

Biography of Salimullah Khan

Philosophy, Psychology, History
and Critical Theory



S M Nazmuz Sakib

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Table of Contents

Copyright Page	21
PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS, FORMATION, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF A MIND	25
A Study in Postcolonial Intellectual Life, Lacanian-Marxist Theory, Legal Philosophy, Political Economy, and the Critique of Colonial Modernity in Bangladesh and Beyond	25
PREFACE TO PART ONE	25
CHAPTER ONE: WHO IS SALIMULLAH KHAN? AN INTRODUCTION TO A LIFE IN THOUGHT	26
1.1 The Intellectual as Social Figure.....	26
1.2 Birth, Origins, and the Geography of Formation	26
1.3 Legal Education and the University of Dhaka	27
1.4 The New School and the American Years.....	28
1.5 Return, Re-engagement, and the Shape of a Career.....	29
CHAPTER TWO: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARCHITECTURE: MARXISM, LACANIAN THEORY, AND BEYOND	30
2.1 Introduction: What Does It Mean to Think Philosophically in Bangladesh?	30
2.2 The Marxist Foundation.....	30
2.3 The Lacanian Turn: Desire, the Subject, and the Social.....	31
2.4 The Lacanian-Marxist Synthesis	33
2.5 Freud and the Foundations	34
2.6 Continental Philosophy: From Hegel to Foucault.....	35
2.7 Frantz Fanon: The Psychopolitics of Decolonization	36
CHAPTER THREE: THE DOCTORAL FORMATION: CENTRAL BANKING, MONEY, AND POLITICAL ECONOMY	37
3.1 The Economic Turn: Why a Lacanian Marxist Studies Central Banking	37
3.2 The Currency School and the Banking School: A Theoretical Debate with Lasting Consequences.....	38
3.3 The Bank of England and the Colonial State	39
3.4 Duncan K. Foley and the Heterodox Economics Tradition	39
CHAPTER FOUR: THE LEGAL DIMENSION: JURISPRUDENCE, COLONIAL LAW, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE	40
4.1 Law as a Site of Colonial Inscription	40
4.2 Personal Law, Communalism, and the Colonial Legal Legacy	40

4.3 Constitutional Law and the Foundations of the Bangladeshi State.....	41
4.4 Legal Positivism, Natural Law, and the Question of Justice.....	42
4.5 Human Rights: Universal Claims and Particular Histories.....	42
CHAPTER FIVE: THE HISTORICAL VISION: BENGAL, PARTITION, AND THE MAKING OF BANGLADESH	43
5.1 The Long History of Bengal	43
5.2 The British Colonial Transformation of Bengal	44
5.3 The Bengal Renaissance and Its Contradictions	45
5.4 Partition, 1947: The Catastrophe and Its Long Aftermath.....	45
5.5 East Pakistan and the Emergence of Bengali Nationalism.....	46
5.6 The Liberation War of 1971: Revolution, Genocide, and the Question of Justice.....	47
5.7 The Question of War Crimes and the Shahbagh Movement	48
CHAPTER SIX: LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE	49
6.1 The Language Question: Bengali as Medium, Bengali as Medium of Liberation	49
6.2 English and Colonial Cringe: The Psychology of Linguistic Self-Deprecation	50
6.3 The Bangla Academy and the Politics of Standardization	50
6.4 Mother Tongue Education and International Debates.....	51
CHAPTER SEVEN: ISLAM, SECULARISM, AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGION IN BANGLADESH.....	52
7.1 The Complex Terrain of Religion and Politics in Bangladesh	52
7.2 The Dawra Degree and Questions of Educational Integration	52
7.3 Communalism, Minorities, and the Rohingya Question	53
7.4 Islam, Modernity, and the Question of Interpretation	53
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE CRITIQUE OF WESTERN THOUGHT: ORIENTALISM, IMPERIALISM, AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE	54
8.1 The Problem of Western Thought in a Postcolonial Context.....	54
8.2 Said and Orientalism: Knowledge as Power	55
8.3 The Post-War International Order: Imperialism in New Forms	55
8.4 India, Bangladesh, and the Regional Dimension of Power.....	56
CHAPTER NINE: CULTURAL CRITICISM: FROM BAUDELAIRE TO BOLLYWOOD.....	56
9.1 The Cultural Critic's Practice.....	56
9.2 Charles Baudelaire and the Critique of Modernity	57

9.3 Kazi Nazrul Islam and Anti-Colonial Democratic Thought	57
9.4 Ahmed Sofa: The Mentor, the Critic, and the Model	58
9.5 Lalon Shah and the Tradition of Baul Philosophy	58
CHAPTER TEN: POLITICAL ANALYSIS: THE STATE, DEMOCRACY, AND THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL	59
10.1 Gramsci, Hegemony, and the Role of Intellectuals	59
10.2 The July 2024 Uprising and Khan's Political Intervention	59
10.3 The Constitution, Democracy, and the Spirit of the Liberation War	60
10.4 Intellectuals, Coercion, and Consent	61
CHAPTER ELEVEN: PSYCHOANALYTIC CULTURAL THEORY AND ITS APPLICATIONS	62
11.1 Applying Psychoanalysis to Social and Political Life	62
11.2 National Identity and the Imaginary	62
11.3 Joissance, Drive, and Political Extremism	63
11.4 The Pervert Structure and the Bangladeshi Ruling Class	63
CHAPTER TWELVE: SYNTHESIS AND ONGOING SIGNIFICANCE	64
12.1 The Coherence of the System	64
12.2 The Question of Intellectual Coherence and Its Critics	65
12.3 Recent Developments: 2024-2026	65
12.4 The Pedagogy of Critical Thinking: Teaching Freud and Lacan in Bangladesh	66
CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: THE GROUNDS FOR A CONTINUING ENCOUNTER	67
SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES FOR PART ONE	68
Key Concepts and Terms	68
Annotated Bibliography for Part One	69
Discussion Questions for Part One	69
Timeline of Key Events and Publications	70
PART TWO: THE LACANIAN-MARXIST SYNTHESIS IN DEPTH	72
Philosophical Foundations, Internal Tensions, and Analytical Productivity	72
PREFACE TO PART TWO	72
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM OF SYNTHESIS	73
13.1 Why Synthesis Is Difficult and Why It Is Necessary	73
13.2 Althusser: The First Systematic Attempt	74

13.3 The Problem of Agency: Between Structure and Practice	75
13.4 The Logic of the Signifier: Language, Desire, and Political Discourse	76
13.5 Zizek: The Ideology of the Fantasy	77
13.6 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony and the Logic of Equivalence	77
13.7 The Limits of the Synthesis: What Lacan Cannot Do for Marx.....	78
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: MARXIST POLITICAL ECONOMY IN KHAN'S WORK	79
14.1 Value, Exploitation, and the Colonial Economy	79
14.2 Dependency Theory and Bangladesh's Global Position	80
14.3 The Agrarian Question and Rural Bangladesh.....	81
14.4 Microfinance, NGOs, and the Political Economy of Development.....	82
14.5 The Political Economy of Language Policy	82
CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE UNCONSCIOUS OF POLITICS: FANTASY, SYMPTOM, AND POLITICAL DESIRE	83
15.1 The Political Unconscious.....	83
15.2 National Fantasy and Its Discontents.....	84
15.3 The Symptom as Political Category	85
15.4 Love, Recognition, and Political Community	85
15.5 Melancholia and Incomplete Mourning in Post-Liberation Bangladesh.....	86
CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS, IDEOLOGY, AND ENLIGHTENMENT	86
16.1 Can There Be False Consciousness?.....	87
16.2 The Intellectual and the Masses: Who Speaks for Whom?.....	87
16.3 Gramscian Organic Intellectualism and Khan's Self-Positioning	88
16.4 Enlightenment, Critique, and the Dialectic of Modernity.....	89
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE ETHICS OF THE LACANIAN-MARXIST INTELLECTUAL	89
17.1 Ethics Between Theory and Practice.....	89
17.2 Fidelity to the Event: Badiou and the Question of Revolutionary Commitment	90
17.3 The Ethics of Translation: Intellectual Responsibility in Cross-Cultural Dialogue	90
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: LACANIAN-MARXIST ANALYSIS IN PRACTICE: THREE CASE STUDIES	91
18.1 Case Study One: The 1971 Liberation War as Revolutionary Event and Its Aftermath...	91
18.2 Case Study Two: The Shahbagh Movement of 2013	92

18.3 Case Study Three: Language Policy and Linguistic Desire	93
CHAPTER NINETEEN: RECENT THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND KHAN'S ONGOING RELEVANCE	94
19.1 Accelerationism, Decolonial Theory, and New Materialisms	94
19.2 Feminist Challenges and Gender in Khan's Analysis	95
19.3 The Digital Turn: Social Media, Algorithmic Governance, and Political Desire	95
19.4 Psychopolitics and the Transformation of Power	96
CHAPTER TWENTY: TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE LACANIAN-MARXIST SYNTHESIS	97
20.1 What the Synthesis Achieves	97
20.2 The Limits of the Synthesis	97
20.3 Khan's Specific Contribution to the Tradition	98
CONCLUSION TO PART TWO	99
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART TWO	99
Key Philosophical Debates Referenced	99
Extended Discussion Questions	100
PART THREE: POLITICAL ECONOMY IN DEPTH	101
From Central Banking to the Postcolonial Economy: Value, Labor, Capital, and the Structures of Dependency	101
PREFACE TO PART THREE	101
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: MONEY, CREDIT, AND THE STATE: REVISITING THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION	102
21.1 The Question That Drives the Dissertation	102
21.2 Gold, Paper, and the Problem of Value	102
21.3 The Bullionist Controversy: Inflation, Suspension, and Theoretical Innovation	103
21.4 Thomas Tooke and the Banking School: A Close Reading	104
21.5 The Bank Charter Act of 1844 and Its Consequences	104
21.6 Marx on Money and Credit: The Theoretical Foundation	105
21.7 Duncan Foley's Contribution: The New Interpretation	106
21.8 From Historical Research to Contemporary Analysis: The Enduring Relevance	106
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COLONIALISM IN BENGAL	107
22.1 Primitive Accumulation and Colonial Dispossession	107

22.2 The Deindustrialization of Bengal: Textiles and the Colonial Division of Labor	108
22.3 The Drain of Wealth: From Dadabhai Naoroji to Contemporary Debates.....	109
22.4 Jute and the Monoculture Economy	109
22.5 Partition 1947 and Economic Dislocation	110
22.6 The East-West Pakistan Economic Relationship	111
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE POSTCOLONIAL ECONOMY OF BANGLADESH ...	111
23.1 Independence and Economic Inheritance.....	111
23.2 The Garment Industry: Accumulation, Exploitation, and Global Value Chains	112
23.3 The Rana Plaza Disaster and the Politics of Safety	113
23.4 Labor, Gender, and the Feminization of Manufacturing.....	114
23.5 Remittances, Migration, and the Transnational Labor Economy.....	115
23.6 The State and Economic Development: Between Neoliberalism and Developmentalism	115
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY: IMPERIALISM, FINANCIALIZATION, AND ALTERNATIVES	116
24.1 Contemporary Imperialism: Beyond the Classical Theories	116
24.2 The Dollar Standard and Monetary Imperialism	117
24.3 Financialization and Its Consequences	118
24.4 Climate Change, Environmental Justice, and Political Economy	119
24.5 Alternatives: From BRICS to New Economic Frameworks	119
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE MISSING LINK.....	120
25.1 Why Political Economy Needs Psychoanalysis.....	120
25.2 The Ideology of Development and the Colonial Desire for Modernization	121
25.3 The Colonial Inheritance and the Superego of Underdevelopment	121
25.4 Class Consciousness and Psychoanalytic Critique.....	122
25.5 Economic Analysis and Literary Form	123
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES AND THE QUESTION OF DEVELOPMENT BEYOND CAPITALISM.....	124
26.1 Can Bangladesh Develop Without Capitalism?	124
26.2 The Commons, Solidarity Economy, and Alternative Economic Forms	124
26.3 Technology, Labor, and the Future of Work in Bangladesh	125
26.4 Fiscal Policy, Taxation, and Economic Justice	126

CONCLUSION TO PART THREE	127
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART THREE	128
Key Economic Concepts and Frameworks	128
Discussion Questions for Part Three	128
Extended Reading List for Part Three	129
PART FOUR: LAW, JURISPRUDENCE, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE	130
Colonial Legal Inheritance, Constitutional Theory, Human Rights, and the Struggle for Justice	130
PREFACE TO PART FOUR	130
CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAW: FOUNDATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS	131
27.1 What Is Law? The Foundational Question	131
27.2 Khan's Jurisprudential Position: Critical Legal Realism	132
27.3 Law and Language: The Semiotic Dimension	133
27.4 Justice Beyond Law: The Gap Between Legal Form and Social Substance	133
CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: COLONIAL LAW AND ITS LEGACY	134
28.1 The Colonial Legal Project: Conquest, Codification, and Control	134
28.2 The Indian Penal Code 1860: A Monument of Colonial Legal Engineering	135
28.3 Property Law and the Colonial Constitution of Land Relations	136
28.4 Colonial Evidence Law and the Construction of Truth	136
28.5 The Law of Sedition, Political Repression, and the Colonial State	137
28.6 The Transfer of Power and the Continuity of Legal Institutions	138
CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND THE THEORY OF THE BANGLADESHI STATE	138
29.1 Constitution-Making as a Revolutionary Act	138
29.2 The Four Pillars and Their Contradictions	139
29.3 The Mujib Amendments and the Destruction of Parliamentary Democracy	140
29.4 Military Coups, Constitutional Manipulation, and the Crisis of Legitimacy	140
29.5 The Doctrine of Basic Structure and Constitutional Entrenchment	141
29.6 The Constitution and Economic Rights: Beyond Formal Political Democracy	142
CHAPTER THIRTY: CRIMINAL LAW, WAR CRIMES, AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE	143
30.1 The Theory of Transitional Justice	143

30.2 The International Crimes Tribunal: Establishment, Proceedings, and Controversies	143
30.3 The Shahbagh Movement and the Politics of Capital Punishment	144
30.4 Truth, Reconciliation, and the Limits of Criminal Prosecution	145
30.5 Criminal Law and Political Repression in the Postcolonial State	146
CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: HUMAN RIGHTS: UNIVERSALISM, PARTICULARITY, AND POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE	147
31.1 The International Human Rights System: Origins and Architecture	147
31.2 Talal Asad and the Genealogy of Human Rights	147
31.3 Rights and Culture: The Universalism-Relativism Debate	148
31.4 Economic and Social Rights: The Question of Justiciability	149
31.5 Minority Rights, Group Rights, and the Limits of Liberal Individualism	149
31.6 Women's Rights and the Politics of Gender in Constitutional Law	150
CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THE FUTURE OF LAW IN BANGLADESH: DECOLONIZATION, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE	151
32.1 What Would a Genuinely Postcolonial Legal System Look Like?	151
32.2 Law and Social Movements: The Dialectic of Legal Reform	152
32.3 International Law, Sovereignty, and Postcolonial Justice	152
CONCLUSION TO PART FOUR.....	153
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART FOUR.....	154
Key Legal Concepts and Frameworks	154
Discussion Questions for Part Four	154
Extended Reading List for Part Four	155
PART FIVE: THE LIBERATION WAR OF 1971 AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY, JUSTICE, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY	156
PREFACE TO PART FIVE.....	156
CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: READING 1971: HISTORY, VIOLENCE, AND THE STRUCTURE OF A NATIONAL FOUNDING	157
33.1 The Problem of Historical Understanding.....	157
33.2 The Historical Background: From 1947 to 1971	158
33.3 The Electoral Crisis of 1970 and the Decision for War	159
33.4 Operation Searchlight: Genocide, Resistance, and the Character of the War	160
33.5 The Role of India: Realpolitik, Regional Interests, and the Question of Liberation	161
33.6 The Scale of Destruction and the Question of Numbers.....	162

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: CONTESTED LEGACIES OF A FOUNDATIONAL EVENT	163
34.1 Memory, Power, and the Production of National History.....	163
34.2 The Awami League and the Politics of Commemoration.....	163
34.3 The Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Counter-Memory of 1971	164
34.4 Jamaat-e-Islami and the Problem of Collaboration	165
34.5 The July 2024 Uprising and the Memory of 1971	166
CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE: WAR CRIMES, TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, AND THE LIMITS OF LAW	167
35.1 Accountability Deferred: The Long Shadow of Impunity.....	167
35.2 The International Crimes Tribunal: Justice Finally Delivered, or Justice Compromised?	168
35.3 The Theory of Transitional Justice: A Critical Engagement.....	169
35.4 The Demands of the Dead: Memory, Reparation, and the Future.....	170
CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: BENGALI, BANGLADESHI, AND MUSLIM.....	171
36.1 The Tripartite Structure of Bangladeshi Identity	171
36.2 The Language Question and the Politics of Cultural Identity	172
36.3 Islam, Secularism, and the Problem of Religious Identity	173
36.4 The Rohingya Crisis and the Limits of Bengali Nationalism	174
CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: 1971 IN WORLD HISTORY.....	175
37.1 The Cold War Framework and Its Distortions	175
37.2 1971 and the Theory of Anti-Colonial Armed Struggle	176
37.3 Comparative Genocide Studies and the Recognition Question	176
CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: THE REVOLUTIONARY PROMISE UNFULFILLED: 1971 AND THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT.....	177
38.1 The Left and the Liberation War: A Complex History.....	177
38.2 BAKSAL and the Tragedy of Mujib's Authoritarianism.....	178
38.3 The Military Interregnum: Zia, Ershad, and the Reorganization of Power	179
38.4 The Restoration of Democracy and Its Limits	180
38.5 The July 2024 Uprising: Revolution, Reform, or Rupture?.....	181
CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE: THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS: 1971 THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL THEORY	182

39.1 1971 as Primal Scene: A Lacanian Reading	182
39.2 The Materialist Supplement: Class, Capital, and the Revolutionary Moment	182
39.3 The Postcolonial Supplement: Dependency, Development, and the Limits of National Sovereignty	183
39.4 Fanon and Khan: The Wretched of the Earth in the Bay of Bengal	184
CONCLUSION TO PART FIVE: THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION	185
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART FIVE.....	186
Key Historical and Theoretical Concepts	186
Discussion Questions for Part Five.....	188
Extended Reading List for Part Five.....	189
PART SIX: LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND CULTURAL POLITICS: THE STRUGGLE FOR BENGALI MODERNITY	191
PREFACE TO PART SIX	191
CHAPTER FORTY: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: WHY IT MATTERS WHAT TONGUE YOU THINK IN.....	192
40.1 Language as World-Formation: The Humboldtian Inheritance	192
40.2 Benjamin on Language: Translation, Loss, and the Task of the Intellectual.....	193
40.3 Fanon on Language: The Colonized Tongue and the Politics of Self-Expression.....	194
40.4 The Lacanian Supplement: The Subject, Language, and Desire.....	195
CHAPTER FORTY-ONE: THE BANGLADESHI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: COLONIAL INHERITANCE AND CLASS REPRODUCTION.....	196
41.1 Three Parallel Systems: The Structural Architecture of Bangladeshi Education	196
41.2 The Colonial Origins of Educational Stratification	197
41.3 The BCS Paradox: Meritocracy, Language, and Structural Disadvantage	198
41.4 The English-Medium Elite and the Crisis of National Solidarity	199
CHAPTER FORTY-TWO: THE BANGLA ACADEMY: INSTITUTION, POLITICS, AND THE GOVERNANCE OF A LANGUAGE.....	200
42.1 The Bangla Academy: History and Mandate	200
42.2 Khan's Critique of the Bangla Academy: Four Dimensions	201
42.3 The Bangla Academy Award Controversy of 2024-2025: A Case Study in Cultural Politics	202
CHAPTER FORTY-THREE: READING THE BENGALI CANON: LALON, TAGORE, NAZRUL, AND THE QUESTION OF TRADITION	202
43.1 The Importance of Canonical Engagement	203

43.2 Lalon Shah: The Mystic as Social Critic.....	203
43.3 Rabindranath Tagore: The Ambivalence of Greatness.....	204
43.4 Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Revolutionary as National Symbol	205
43.5 Ahmed Sofa: The Mentor and the Challenge	206
CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR: THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION: MAKING WORLD THOUGHT BENGALI	206
44.1 Translation as Political Act	206
44.2 The Dictionary Project and the Problem of Technical Vocabulary	207
CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE: CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: THE DECEMBER 2024 CONFERENCE AND BEYOND	208
45.1 The December 2024 Conference: Language Evolution and the Stakes of Engagement ...	208
45.2 India, Language, and the Regional Politics of Culture	209
45.3 Digital Technology, Social Media, and the New Language Politics	210
CHAPTER FORTY-SIX: THE UNIVERSITY AS SITE OF STRUGGLE: HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE	210
46.1 The University in Postcolonial Bangladesh: Between Mission and Market	211
46.2 The Private University System and the Commodification of Higher Education	211
46.3 The Quota System and the University as Site of Social Conflict	212
CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN: TOWARD A BENGALI MODERNITY: SYNTHESIS AND VISION	213
47.1 What Is Bengali Modernity?	213
47.2 The Three Pillars of Bengali Intellectual Modernity	214
47.3 The Challenge of 2025 and 2026: Opportunity and Danger	214
CONCLUSION TO PART SIX: LANGUAGE AS POLITICS, CULTURE AS STRUGGLE ...	215
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART SIX.....	216
Key Concepts in Language and Cultural Politics	216
Discussion Questions for Part Six.....	217
Extended Reading List for Part Six.....	218
PART SEVEN: COMMUNALISM, RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM, AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY.....	219
Understanding the Crisis of Secular Democracy in Bangladesh	219
PART COORDINATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART SEVEN.....	219
CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT: THE COLONIAL MANUFACTURE OF COMMUNALISM....	221

48.1 What Is Communalism? A Conceptual Starting Point	221
48.2 The British Colonial State and the Production of Community.....	221
48.3 The 1905 Partition, the 1911 Annulment, and the Deepening of the Communal Divide..	223
48.4 The Permanent Settlement, Class, and the Muslim Peasantry	224
CHAPTER FORTY-NINE: THE PARTITIONS OF 1947 AND THEIR AFTERMATH	225
49.1 The Logic of Partition.....	225
49.2 The Language Movement and the Founding of a National Consciousness	227
49.3 The Class Character of Pakistani Nationalism and Its Discontents	227
CHAPTER FIFTY: THE 1971 LIBERATION WAR AND THE FOUNDING OF BANGLADESH.....	228
50.1 The Three Principles: Equality, Human Dignity, Social Justice	228
50.2 The Role of Islamism in 1971	229
50.3 The Founding Constitution and Its Secular Commitments	230
CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE: THE ISLAMIZATION OF BANGLADESH AFTER 1975	231
51.1 The Assassination of Mujib and the Political Transformation	231
51.2 The Re-emergence of Jamaat and the Politics of 1971's Memory	232
51.3 The Shahbagh Movement of 2013 and Its Implications	233
51.4 Khan's Critique of Farhad Mazhar	234
CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO: HEFAZAT-E-ISLAM AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS POPULISM	235
52.1 The Rise of Hefazat	235
52.2 The Class Basis of Hefazat Politics	236
52.3 The Psychoanalytic Dimension: Jouissance, the Other, and Communal Violence	237
52.4 The Pattern of Anti-Hindu Violence	238
CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE: THE ROHINGYA QUESTION.....	239
53.1 Historical Context	239
53.2 Bangladesh and the Rohingya Refugees	240
53.3 The Rohingya and Regional Geopolitics	240
CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR: KHAN'S ANALYSIS OF INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS..	241
54.1 The Anti-Colonial Framework	241
54.2 The Minority Protection Issue	242
54.3 The July 2024 Uprising and India	242

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELIGION, SECULARISM, AND DEMOCRACY	243
55.1 Against Secular Fundamentalism.....	243
55.2 For Democratic Secularism.....	244
55.3 Islam, the Bengali Muslim Tradition, and Political Possibility.....	245
55.4 Talal Asad and the Critique of Secular Liberalism	246
CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY	247
56.1 The Uprising as Political Event.....	247
56.2 The Complex Character of the Anti-Hasina Coalition	247
56.3 Communal Violence After August 2024.....	248
56.4 The Interim Government and the Question of Democratic Transition	249
CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN: JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI, POLITICAL THEOLOGY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY	249
57.1 Mawdudi and the Origins of Jamaat's Political Theology	250
57.2 Jamaat After 1971	250
57.3 The War Crimes Tribunal and Its Aftermath.....	251
CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT: IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION	252
58.1 Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition.....	252
58.2 Hegel, Recognition, and the Master-Slave Dialectic	253
58.3 Identity, Difference, and the Democratic Challenge.....	253
CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES (2024-2026).....	254
59.1 The Post-Uprising Political Landscape	254
59.2 The India-Bangladesh Relationship in 2025 and 2026.....	255
59.3 Khan's North South University Period and Intellectual Trajectory	256
59.4 The Question of Bangladesh's Future Democratic Identity	257
CHAPTER SIXTY: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNALISM AND SECULARISM.....	258
60.1 South Asian Comparative Framework	258
60.2 Pakistan and the Experiment with Islamic Nationalism	258
60.3 Turkey and the Secular-Islamic Tension	259

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE: TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN BANGLADESH.....	260
61.1 The Pluralist Vision	260
61.2 The Role of Education	261
61.3 Law, Justice, and the Protection of Minorities.....	261
CONCLUSION TO PART SEVEN: COMMUNALISM, DEMOCRACY, AND THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR BANGLADESHI MODERNITY	262
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART SEVEN	263
Key Concepts in Communalism, Secularism, and Identity Politics	263
Discussion Questions for Part Seven	265
Extended Reading List for Part Seven.....	266
PART EIGHT: POLITICAL ECONOMY, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE CRITIQUE OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM.....	267
Salimullah Khan's Economic Analysis from Central Banking Theory to Postcolonial Development Critique.....	267
PART COORDINATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART EIGHT	267
CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO: THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION: THEORIES OF CENTRAL BANKING IN ENGLAND, 1793-1877.....	268
62.1 The Choice of Topic and Its Significance.....	268
62.2 The Currency School and the Banking School: A Theoretical Overview.....	269
62.3 Khan's Analysis and Its Implications.....	270
62.4 Implications for Contemporary Monetary Theory.....	271
62.5 Duncan K. Foley and the New School Tradition.....	272
CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE: THE COLONIAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BENGAL	273
63.1 The Drain of Wealth	273
63.2 The Permanent Settlement and Agrarian Capitalism	274
63.3 The Bengal Famine of 1943	275
63.4 The Industrial Structure of Colonial Bengal and Its Legacy	275
CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR: DEPENDENCY THEORY AND WORLD SYSTEMS ANALYSIS	276
64.1 Prebisch and the Latin American Structuralists.....	276
64.2 Frank, Cardoso, and the Debate About Dependency	277
64.3 Wallerstein and World-Systems Theory.....	278

64.4 The Resource Curse and the Remittance Economy	279
CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE: THE GARMENT INDUSTRY AND DEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT	280
65.1 The Rise of the Ready-Made Garments Industry	280
65.2 Global Value Chains and the Distribution of Value	280
65.3 The Rana Plaza Disaster and Its Structural Significance	281
65.4 Labor Rights and the Politics of the Minimum Wage	282
CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX: MICROFINANCE, SOCIAL ENTERPRISE, AND THE IDEOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT OF POVERTY	283
66.1 The Grameen Bank and the Global Microfinance Industry	283
66.2 The Social Business Paradigm and Its Limitations.....	284
66.3 BRAC and the Non-Governmental Sector.....	285
CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN: NEOLIBERALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN BANGLADESH	286
67.1 The Washington Consensus and Its Application to Bangladesh	286
67.2 The IMF and the Bangladesh Economy in 2023-2025	287
67.3 The Economic Dimensions of the July 2024 Uprising.....	287
67.4 The Post-Uprising Economic Challenge.....	288
CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT: MONEY, FINANCE, AND POWER	289
68.1 The Theory of Money Revisited.....	289
68.2 The Bangladesh Banking Sector and Its Pathologies.....	290
68.3 The Exchange Rate and Development Policy	290
68.4 Islamic Finance and the Banking System	291
CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE: AGRARIAN QUESTION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT	292
69.1 The Persistence of the Agrarian Question	292
69.2 Land Reform and the Persistence of Inequality	292
69.3 Climate Change and the Future of Bangladeshi Agriculture	293
CHAPTER SEVENTY: POSTCOLONIAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND ITS CRITICS 294	
70.1 The Challenge of Post-Development Theory	294
70.2 Amartya Sen and the Capabilities Approach.....	295
70.3 Ha-Joon Chang and the Kicking Away the Ladder.....	296
70.4 The Developmental State and Its Prospects in Bangladesh.....	296

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE: ECONOMICS, JUSTICE, AND THE PROBLEM OF GROWTH	
.....	297
71.1 Growth, Distribution, and the Measurement Problem	297
71.2 Thomas Piketty and Global Inequality	298
71.3 Degrowth and the Future of Development	299
CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO: CAPITAL, LABOR, AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION	300
72.1 Marx's Capital and Its Relevance to Bangladesh	300
72.2 The Informal Economy and Primitive Accumulation	300
72.3 Women, Labor, and the Feminist Political Economy	301
CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE: ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY AND DEVELOPMENT	
ALTERNATIVES	302
73.1 The Right to Development	302
73.2 South-South Cooperation and New Development Finance	303
73.3 Khan's Vision for Bangladeshi Development	303
CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE JULY 2024 UPRISING	
AND AFTER	305
74.1 The Economic Roots of Political Transformation	305
74.2 Economic Policy Under the Yunus Government	306
74.3 The Class Question and the Future of Bangladeshi Development	306
CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE: POLITICAL ECONOMY AS MORAL PHILOSOPHY	307
75.1 The Ethics of Economic Life	307
75.2 Adam Smith and the Moral Foundations of Political Economy	308
75.3 John Rawls and Distributive Justice	308
75.4 The Political Economy of Freedom	309
CONCLUSION TO PART EIGHT: POLITICAL ECONOMY AS ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP	
.....	310
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART EIGHT	311
Key Concepts in Political Economy and Development Theory	311
Discussion Questions for Part Eight	312
Extended Reading List for Part Eight	313
PART NINE: LEGAL THEORY, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, AND JURISPRUDENTIAL	
ANALYSIS	314

Salimullah Khan's Engagement with Law, Rights, Justice, and the Constitutional Foundations of Democratic Governance in Bangladesh and the Postcolonial World.....	314
PREFACE TO PART NINE	314
CHAPTER 73: THE LAWYER AS CRITICAL THEORIST: FORMATION, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE LEGAL IMAGINATION	316
73.1 What the Law School Gives and What It Takes Away.....	316
73.2 The Encounter with Legal Philosophy	317
73.3 Law as a Lacanian Object: Rules, Desire, and the Symbolic Order	319
73.4 The Pedagogy of Law: Teaching as Intellectual Practice.....	320
CHAPTER 74: COLONIAL LAW AND ITS POSTCOLONIAL AFTERLIVES	321
74.1 The Legal Architecture of Empire.....	321
74.2 The Indian Penal Code and Its Colonial Character	322
74.3 Personal Law, Communalism, and the Colonial Management of Religious Difference ...	323
74.4 The Transfer of Power and the Continuity of Legal Structures.....	324
CHAPTER 75: CONSTITUTIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE.....	325
75.1 The Constitution of 1972: Promise and Its Limitations	325
75.2 The Secularism Debate: Constitutional Principle and Political Reality	326
75.3 Parliamentary Sovereignty versus Constitutional Supremacy	328
75.4 The Question of Constituent Power	329
CHAPTER 76: RIGHTS, JUSTICE, AND LEGAL PLURALISM IN KHAN'S JURISPRUDENCE	329
76.1 The Critique of Rights Discourse	329
76.2 International Human Rights Law and Its Postcolonial Critique.....	330
76.3 Legal Pluralism and the Challenge of Islamic Law	331
76.4 Rights and the Question of Social and Economic Rights.....	333
CHAPTER 77: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING: LAW, CONSTITUTION, AND DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY	334
77.1 The Constitutional Crisis of 2024	334
77.2 The Right to Resistance and the Problem of Constitutional Legitimacy	335
77.3 The Interim Government and Constitutional Legitimacy.....	336
77.4 Khan and the Politics of the Post-Uprising Settlement.....	336

CHAPTER 78: CRIMINAL JUSTICE, STATE VIOLENCE, AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE	
.....	337
78.1 The War Crimes Tribunals: Justice or Politics?	337
78.2 Extrajudicial Killings and the Problem of State Impunity	338
78.3 The Shahbagh Movement and the Politics of Accountability	339
78.4 Transitional Justice as a Framework for Democratic Consolidation.....	340
CHAPTER 79: SOVEREIGNTY, INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD ORDER.....	341
79.1 The Problem of Sovereignty in the Postcolonial Era	341
79.2 India and Bangladesh: A Legal Analysis of Regional Hegemony.....	342
79.3 The Rohingya Crisis and International Legal Obligations	343
CHAPTER 80: TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL LEGAL PHILOSOPHY: SYNTHESIS AND PROSPECTS	344
80.1 The Elements of Khan's Legal Philosophy	344
80.2 Khan in Dialogue with Contemporary Legal Theory	345
80.3 The Bangla Academy Award and Its Controversies: A Legal and Cultural Analysis.....	346
80.4 Legal Education Reform and the Future of Bengali Legal Culture	347
CONCLUSION TO PART NINE: LAW AS LIBERATION OR LAW AS DOMINATION?....	348
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART NINE	349
Key Concepts in Legal Theory and Jurisprudence.....	349
Discussion Questions for Part Nine	351
Extended Reading List for Part Nine.....	352
PART TEN: SYNTHESIS, LEGACY, AND THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN BANGLADESH.....	354
Salimullah Khan's Intellectual Project in Global Perspective	354
PREFACE TO PART TEN.....	354
CHAPTER 81: THE DEEP STRUCTURE OF KHAN'S INTELLECTUAL PROJECT	355
81.1 The Problem of Emancipation	355
81.2 The Dialectical Method.....	356
81.3 Language, Thought, and the Politics of the Medium	357
81.4 The Public Intellectual in the Age of Digital Media	358
CHAPTER 82: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT: STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND CHALLENGES.....	359

82.1 The Strengths of Khan's Intellectual Project	359
82.2 The Challenges and Limitations	360
82.3 Khan in Comparative Perspective: Analogues and Contrasts.....	361
82.4 The Bengali Intellectual Tradition: Khan's Place in a Longer Story	362
CHAPTER 83: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING AND ITS INTELLECTUAL AFTERMATH: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS.....	362
83.1 Khan as Witness and Interpreter	363
83.2 The Quota Reform Movement and the Sociology of a Generation.....	363
83.3 The Significance of Youth and Generation.....	364
CHAPTER 84: THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN BANGLADESH.....	365
84.1 The Institutionalization of Critical Thought	365
84.2 The International Dimensions of Bangladeshi Critical Theory	365
84.3 Khan and the Post-Uprising Bangladesh	366
CONCLUSION: AN INTELLECTUAL FOR OUR TIME.....	367
CONCLUSION TO THE TEXTBOOK: SYNTHESIS AND FORWARD MOVEMENT	368
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART TEN	369
Key Concepts in Intellectual History and Critical Theory.....	369
Final Discussion Questions	370
Extended Reading List for Part Ten	371

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SALIMULLAH KHAN: PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY, HISTORY, AND CRITICAL THEORY

A Comprehensive Academic Textbook in Ten Parts

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Published: 2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.19490890](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19490890)

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The preparation of this textbook has involved engagement with the published and unpublished writings of Salimullah Khan, as well as with the broader intellectual traditions within which his work must be situated. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of citations and attributions.

Published in electronic format only

First Edition

Cataloging Note: This work is registered with the Zenodo open-access repository under the DOI provided above. For citation purposes, please use the following format:

Sakib, S. M. N. (2026). *Salimullah Khan: Philosophy, Psychology, History, and Critical Theory: A Comprehensive Academic Textbook in Ten Parts*. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19490890

PREFACE

This book is the result of a conviction that the intellectual work of Salimullah Khan deserves sustained, systematic, and critical engagement. Over more than four decades, Khan has established himself as one of the most distinctive and consequential voices to emerge from Bangladesh in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He is a legal scholar who writes poetry, an economist whose doctoral thesis traced the arcane history of central banking in nineteenth century England yet whose essays address the intimate psychic wounds left by colonial rule, a Marxist who finds his most productive analytical tools not in the economic categories of Capital alone but in the psychoanalytic language of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, a Bengali nationalist who insists that Bengali nationalism can only be understood through the lens of anti colonial theory developed in the Caribbean, the Maghreb, and sub Saharan Africa. He is, in the fullest sense of the phrase, a public intellectual, someone who participates in the life of ideas not as a private luxury but as a public responsibility.

The ambition of this textbook is correspondingly large. It attempts to trace the full arc of Khan's intellectual development, to map the philosophical architecture of his thought, to examine his engagement with the major intellectual traditions that have shaped him, to analyze his contributions to history, political economy, legal theory, cultural criticism, and political philosophy, and to assess his significance for Bangladeshi and global intellectual life. The book is organized in ten parts, each of which can be read as a self contained study of a particular dimension of Khan's work, while also building cumulatively toward a comprehensive picture of his intellectual project as a whole.

Part One establishes the biographical, historical, and foundational theoretical frameworks for the entire study. It traces Khan's life from his birth in Cox's Bazar in 1958 through his legal education at the University of Dhaka, his years in the United States where he completed his doctorate at The New School for Social Research, and his return to Bangladesh and subsequent decades of teaching, writing, and intellectual engagement. It introduces the major conceptual frameworks that shape his work, with particular attention to the Lacanian Marxist synthesis that functions as his primary analytical lens, and it situates his work within the history of Bangladesh and the broader history of decolonization.

Part Two takes the Lacanian Marxist synthesis as its primary object of analysis, examining the philosophical foundations of this combination, the tensions and contradictions it generates, and its analytical productivity when applied to the specific problems that Khan cares about. It situates Khan's version of the synthesis within the broader history of Lacanian Marxism, from Althusser through Laclau and Mouffe to Zizek, and identifies what is distinctive about Khan's contribution to this tradition.

Part Three turns to the political economy that underpins Khan's intellectual project, examining his doctoral research on the history of central banking in nineteenth century England and connecting this work to his broader analysis of the political economy of colonialism, the specific features of the post independence Bangladeshi economy, and the structural dependencies that continue to shape Bangladesh's position in the global economic order.

Part Four examines Khan's engagement with law, jurisprudence, and the theory of the state. It traces the colonial legal heritage that continues to shape the Bangladeshi legal system, analyzes his constitutional philosophy including his sustained critique of the 1972 constitution and its subsequent amendments, examines his engagement with questions of criminal justice and transitional justice, and explores his philosophy of human rights as it emerges from the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh.

Part Five is devoted to what is perhaps the most emotionally and politically charged dimension of Khan's work: his analysis of the Liberation War of 1971 and its legacy. It examines his historical account of the war, his analysis of the politics of memory that has surrounded it, his engagement with the question of justice and accountability, and his vision of what the liberation movement promised and how that promise has been betrayed and might yet be redeemed.

Part Six examines the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Khan's intellectual project, tracing the philosophical foundations of his advocacy for Bengali in the traditions of Humboldt, Benjamin, and Fanon, analyzing his critique of the Bangladeshi educational system and its class reproductive functions, examining his engagement with the Bangla Academy and the politics of cultural institutions, and exploring his critical engagements with the major figures of Bengali literary and intellectual tradition, including Lalon Shah, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Ahmed Sofa.

Part Seven turns to one of the most urgent and dangerous challenges facing Bangladeshi society: the question of communalism, religious extremism, and the politics of identity. It traces Khan's historical analysis of communalism's colonial origins, his examination of the specific Islamist formations that carry communalist politics in contemporary Bangladesh, his engagement with the Shahbagh movement and the July 2024 uprising, and his development of a theory of democratic secularism as an alternative to both religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism.

Part Eight examines Khan's political economy in depth, from his doctoral research on central banking through his analysis of the colonial political economy of Bengal, his engagement with dependency theory and world systems analysis, his critique of the garment industry and microfinance, his analysis of neoliberal development ideology, and his vision of an alternative development path for Bangladesh organized around the principles of equity, democratic sovereignty, and genuine human development.

Part Nine examines the legal dimensions of Khan's intellectual project, including his analysis of colonial law and its postcolonial afterlives, his constitutional philosophy, his theory of rights, his engagement with the international human rights system, his analysis of criminal justice and transitional justice, and his vision of a postcolonial legal philosophy adequate to the challenges of democratic governance in the contemporary world.

Part Ten attempts a synthesis of Khan's intellectual project as a whole, identifying the deep structure of his thought, the fundamental commitments that give unity to the diversity of his intellectual engagements, and his place in the broader landscape of global intellectual life. It also engages in a more explicitly evaluative mode, assessing the strengths and limitations of his intellectual project and reflecting on its significance for the future of critical thought in Bangladesh and beyond.

This book is addressed to students, scholars, and general readers who wish to understand one of the most distinctive intellectual voices of our time. It is written with the conviction that the questions Khan asks are not parochial questions about a small country at the edge of South Asia but universal questions about colonialism and its afterlives, about the conditions of genuine freedom, about the relationship between thought and political practice, about the possibilities for developing intellectual frameworks adequate to the challenges of the postcolonial world. The answers Khan gives to these questions are grounded in the specific history and culture of Bengal, but their significance extends far beyond that context.

A methodological note is in order before we begin. This textbook is committed to engaging with Khan's work on its own terms, which means taking seriously ideas that may strike readers trained in other traditions as unusual, difficult, or even perverse. Lacanian psychoanalysis is not easy reading. The synthesis of Lacan with Marx is not self evidently coherent. The application of European critical theory to Bangladeshi political life raises genuine questions about translation, transplantation, and intellectual dependency. We will not paper over these difficulties. We will instead treat them as opportunities: opportunities to think more carefully about what theory is, what it is for, and how it travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The preparation of this textbook has been a collaborative endeavor spanning several years. It has involved conversations with students and colleagues in Dhaka, New York, and elsewhere, engagements with Khan's own voluminous published and unpublished writings, and sustained reflection on the broader intellectual traditions within which his work must be situated. The result is offered not as a definitive or final word on Khan's intellectual project but as an invitation to further engagement, a resource for those who wish to enter into conversation with one of the most challenging and rewarding thinkers of our time.

The book is complete as it stands, but it is also intended as a living document. Khan's intellectual project continues to develop, new scholarship on his work will continue to appear, and the political and cultural questions to which he has devoted his career will continue to demand the kind of serious, sustained, and critical engagement that his work exemplifies. Future editions will reflect these developments. For now, we offer this book in the hope that it will contribute to the understanding of Khan's work and to the broader project of critical intellectual practice that his life and thought so powerfully exemplify.

PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS, FORMATION, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF A MIND

A Study in Postcolonial Intellectual Life, Lacanian-Marxist Theory, Legal Philosophy, Political Economy, and the Critique of Colonial Modernity in Bangladesh and Beyond

PREFACE TO PART ONE

This textbook is addressed to students, scholars, and general readers who wish to understand one of the most distinctive intellectual voices to emerge from Bangladesh in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Salimullah Khan is a figure who defies easy categorization. He is a legal scholar who writes poetry. He is an economist whose doctoral thesis dealt with the arcane history of central banking in nineteenth-century England, yet whose essays address the intimate psychic wounds left by colonial rule. He is a Marxist who finds his most productive analytical tools not in the economic categories of Capital alone but in the psychoanalytic language of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. He is a Bengali nationalist who insists that Bengali nationalism can only be understood through the lens of anti-colonial theory developed in the Caribbean, the Maghreb, and sub-Saharan Africa. He is, in the fullest sense of the phrase, a public intellectual: someone who participates in the life of ideas not as a private luxury but as a public responsibility.

Part One of this textbook lays the groundwork for everything that follows. It is organized around three broad movements. The first is biographical: we trace the arc of Khan's life from his birth in Cox's Bazar in 1958 through his legal education at the University of Dhaka, his years in the United States where he completed his doctorate at The New School for Social Research, and his return to Bangladesh and subsequent decades of teaching, writing, and intellectual engagement. The second movement is philosophical and theoretical: we introduce the major conceptual frameworks that shape Khan's work, paying particular attention to the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis that functions as his primary analytical lens, but also attending to his engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, with the Frankfurt School tradition, with postcolonial theory, and with the broader currents of Continental philosophy. The third movement is historical and contextual: we situate Khan's work within the history of Bangladesh, the history of Bengal more broadly, and the global history of decolonization, in order to understand why the questions he asks are the questions they are, and why the answers he gives take the forms they take.

One methodological note before we begin. This textbook is committed to engaging with Khan's work on its own terms, which means taking seriously ideas that may strike readers trained in other traditions as unusual, difficult, or even perverse. Lacanian psychoanalysis is not easy reading. The synthesis of Lacan with Marx is not self-evidently coherent. The application of European critical theory to Bangladeshi political life raises genuine questions about translation, transplantation, and intellectual dependency. We will not paper over these difficulties. We will instead treat them as opportunities: opportunities to think more carefully about what theory is, what it is for, and how it travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

CHAPTER ONE: WHO IS SALIMULLAH KHAN? AN INTRODUCTION TO A LIFE IN THOUGHT

1.1 The Intellectual as Social Figure

Before we can understand Salimullah Khan, we need to understand the social role he occupies. In Bangladesh, as in many postcolonial societies, the figure of the public intellectual carries a weight that is difficult to appreciate from the vantage point of contemporary Western academic life, where intellectuals are often confined to university campuses and specialist journals. In Bangladesh, the public intellectual is expected to comment on elections, on religious extremism, on the language of education, on the proper understanding of the Liberation War of 1971, on relations with India and with the broader international community, and on the everyday conditions of life for ordinary people. The intellectual is a moral authority as much as a cognitive one. The intellectual's voice is heard on television, in newspapers, at public rallies, and in the informal circuits of political discussion that run through every level of Bangladeshi society.

This is the role that Khan has occupied since at least the 1980s, when he returned from the United States with a newly minted doctorate and a head full of difficult European theories that he was determined to put to work on Bangladeshi realities. His career has been marked by controversy: controversy about his political alignments, about his interpretations of history, about his reading of Islam and secularism, about his advocacy for Bengali as the exclusive medium of higher education, and about his sometimes sharp judgments about his contemporaries and predecessors. But controversy, as Khan himself would likely insist, is not a sign of failure in intellectual life. It is a sign that something real is at stake.

What makes Khan particularly interesting as an object of study is precisely the tension between his local rootedness and his global intellectual formation. He is deeply, passionately Bengali, committed to the Bengali language as the proper vehicle of thought and culture, fiercely opposed to what he sees as the colonial cringe that causes educated Bangladeshis to prefer English over their mother tongue. And yet his intellectual formation is thoroughly transnational: he was educated at The New School in New York, a institution with strong roots in the tradition of European critical theory that was carried to the United States by refugees from Nazism; he reads Freud in German (via translation) and Lacan in French; he engages with African and Caribbean thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire as central interlocutors rather than peripheral influences; he has been a fellow at SOAS in London and at Stockholm University in Sweden.

This tension between local commitment and global formation is not a contradiction to be resolved. It is, rather, a productive friction that generates much of the energy of Khan's thought. Understanding this tension is the first task of this textbook.

1.2 Birth, Origins, and the Geography of Formation

Salimullah Khan was born on 18 August 1958 in the Gorokhata union of Maheshkhali Upazila in Cox's Bazar District. This biographical detail matters more than it might initially seem. Cox's Bazar is the southernmost district of what is now Bangladesh, a region with its own distinctive geography and history. It is a coastal district, facing the Bay of Bengal, with a history shaped by

maritime trade, by the presence of Buddhist communities in adjacent Myanmar (then Burma), and by the complex layering of Bengali, Rakhine, and other cultural influences. The district is home to what is now the world's largest refugee camp, as Rohingya Muslims have fled violence in Myanmar, and this proximity to the Rohingya crisis has informed Khan's thinking on communalism, displacement, and state violence.

Maheshkhali is an island upazila within Cox's Bazar District, accessible by boat from the mainland. Growing up on an island, at the edge of the country, at the edge of the subcontinent, with the Bay of Bengal stretching southward and the hills of what would become Myanmar visible on clear days, is a kind of geographical formation that leaves its mark. Marginality, in its spatial form, can become a vantage point. The person who grows up at the edge of things sometimes sees the center more clearly than those who inhabit it.

Khan's family was Bengali Muslim, and his early education took him from the coast to the city. He passed his Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination from Chattogram Cantonment High School and his Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) from Chattogram College, two institutions that represented different faces of educated life in what was then East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh. The Cantonment school placed him in proximity to the military culture that would shape so much of Bangladesh's political history, while Chattogram College was a more overtly civilian and intellectual institution with strong roots in the liberal and nationalist traditions of Bengali education.

It was during these years of secondary and higher secondary education that Khan's political consciousness began to take shape. He has spoken and written about his involvement, for a brief period, with the student wing of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), the National Socialist Party, which was one of the more radical leftist formations of the era. The JSD represented a particular moment in Bangladeshi political life: the moment immediately after independence in 1971, when it seemed briefly possible that the country might take a genuinely socialist path. The party's student wing was energetic, idealistic, and committed to a vision of social transformation that went beyond the limited nationalism of the Awami League mainstream. Khan's engagement with this formation, even if brief, planted seeds of a lifelong commitment to questions of social justice, popular sovereignty, and the proper relationship between intellectuals and mass movements.

1.3 Legal Education and the University of Dhaka

Khan went on to study law at the University of Dhaka. This choice of discipline is significant. Law, in the context of postcolonial Bangladesh, is not merely a technical field. It is a site where the colonial inheritance is most visibly inscribed, where the structures of British rule have been most directly transmitted into the post-independence period, and where the tensions between formal equality and substantive justice are most acutely felt. The University of Dhaka's law faculty was, in the 1970s and early 1980s, a place where these tensions were regularly debated, and where the question of what kind of law a sovereign, postcolonial people should have was very much alive.

Legal education also gave Khan a particular kind of analytical training. The lawyer's habit of reading texts closely, of attending to the precise formulation of propositions, of identifying the assumptions hidden within apparently neutral categories, of tracing the historical development of legal concepts through specific institutional contexts: all of these habits of thought would prove useful when Khan turned to the analysis of philosophical texts, psychoanalytic concepts, and political ideologies. There is a structural similarity between the close reading of a legal judgment and the close reading of a passage from Lacan or Marx, and Khan's legal training gave him a foundation for the kind of rigorous textual analysis that characterizes his best work.

It was also during his years at Dhaka that Khan came under the influence of Ahmed Sofa (1943-2001), the towering Bengali essayist, novelist, and intellectual who is widely regarded as the most important Bangladeshi thinker of the twentieth century. The relationship between Khan and Sofa was complex: it was at once a relationship of discipleship and of productive disagreement. Sofa was famously difficult, uncompromising, and relentlessly critical of what he saw as the intellectual mediocrity and political cowardice of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia. He was also deeply learned, with a command of Bengali literary tradition, Islamic philosophy, and Western thought that was unusual in its breadth. Khan's first book, published in 1983, was a critique of a famous lecture by the political scientist Abdur Razzaq, and it immediately drew Sofa's censure, even as it established Khan as a serious intellectual voice. This relationship, in which the older thinker was both a model and a critic, shaped Khan's intellectual development in ways that he has reflected on extensively in his subsequent writing.

1.4 The New School and the American Years

In 1986, Khan left Bangladesh for the United States, where he would spend a significant portion of the following decade pursuing his doctoral education at The New School for Social Research in New York. This institution deserves a moment of attention, because it is not simply an American university of the usual kind. The New School was founded in 1919 by a group of progressive American intellectuals dissatisfied with the constraints of traditional academic institutions, and it became, in the 1930s and 1940s, a haven for European intellectuals fleeing fascism. Philosophers, sociologists, economists, and psychologists from Germany, Austria, France, and elsewhere brought with them the intellectual traditions of European critical thought, and the University in Exile (as the graduate faculty was initially known) became one of the primary sites through which the Frankfurt School tradition, phenomenology, and other currents of Continental philosophy were transmitted to American intellectual life.

When Khan arrived at The New School in the late 1980s, this tradition was still very much alive. The institution was committed to interdisciplinary, critical, and politically engaged scholarship in ways that made it an ideal environment for someone with Khan's intellectual ambitions and political commitments. His doctoral dissertation, supervised by the economist Duncan K. Foley (himself a distinguished heterodox economist with strong interests in Marxist economic theory), was titled *Theories of Central Banking in England, 1793-1877*. This is a topic that might seem far removed from the postcolonial politics and psychoanalytic cultural criticism that Khan would become known for, but the connection is more intimate than it appears.

The history of central banking in England in the period Khan studied is the history of the emergence of a particular form of financial capitalism, and it is a period that includes some of the most important intellectual debates about money, credit, value, and the relationship between the state and the economy. The debates of this period, between the Currency School and the Banking School, about whether the money supply should be rigidly controlled or allowed to expand with commercial needs, are debates about the fundamental nature of money and its relationship to real economic activity: debates that remain unresolved to this day and that have become newly urgent in the era of quantitative easing, cryptocurrency, and the global financial crisis. Khan's immersion in these debates gave him a sophisticated understanding of monetary theory and financial history that informs his analysis of economic issues even when he does not explicitly foreground it.

More broadly, the experience of studying at The New School in New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period that saw the end of the Cold War, the collapse of actually existing socialism, the acceleration of neoliberal globalization, and the intensification of academic debates about postmodernism and postcolonialism, was a formative intellectual experience. Khan was immersed in a world where the great theoretical frameworks of the twentieth century were simultaneously being challenged and defended, where new voices from the formerly colonized world were insisting on their right to shape the conversation, and where the relationship between academic theory and political practice was a matter of urgent concern.

During his American years, Khan also taught at State University of New York at Purchase (1988-1989) and at The City University of New York (1993-1998), gaining experience in American higher education that would inform his subsequent thinking about education systems, pedagogical methods, and the politics of knowledge production.

1.5 Return, Re-engagement, and the Shape of a Career

Khan returned to Bangladesh after completing his doctorate in 2000, and the subsequent quarter-century has been the period of his most sustained and influential intellectual production. He taught briefly at East West University (2001-2002) before joining Stamford University Bangladesh in 2005, where he served as a Professor in the Department of Law until 2012. From 2012 until 2025, he was at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), where he directed the Centre for Advanced Theory. Since 2025, he has been at North South University, where he is a Professor in the Department of History and Philosophy.

These institutional affiliations matter because they trace a movement from law to cultural theory to history and philosophy, a movement that tracks the expansion and deepening of Khan's intellectual range. At Stamford, he was primarily a legal academic. At ULAB, he became a cultural theorist and intellectual impresario, organizing seminars, publishing journals, and creating a space where interdisciplinary critical thought could flourish. At North South University, he is engaging with historical and philosophical questions in a more explicitly academic register, while also continuing to be one of the most prominent voices in Bangladesh's public intellectual life.

The year 2025 was eventful for Khan in several ways. He received the Bangla Academy Literary Award, Bangladesh's most prestigious literary prize, though the ceremony was attended by controversy about the selection process and about the treatment of award recipients. He delivered a keynote address at a seminar on the July 2024 mass uprising in Bangladesh, drawing on Fanon's concept of political awakening to analyze the events that had led to the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He continued to speak and write on questions of education, language policy, communalism, and the proper foundations of a democratic polity in Bangladesh. And he joined North South University, bringing his distinctive intellectual style to a new institutional home.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARCHITECTURE: MARXISM, LACANIAN THEORY, AND BEYOND

2.1 Introduction: What Does It Mean to Think Philosophically in Bangladesh?

Before we can understand the specific philosophical framework that Khan has developed and deployed, we need to ask a preliminary question: what does it mean to do philosophy in a postcolonial context? This is not a question with an obvious answer, and different intellectuals in postcolonial societies have answered it differently. Some have argued that philosophy, properly speaking, is a universal enterprise, and that the task of the postcolonial intellectual is simply to participate in the global conversation of ideas on equal terms, bringing local knowledge and experience to bear on questions that are genuinely universal. Others have argued that philosophy as it has been practiced in the Western tradition is deeply marked by its origins in specific historical and social conditions, and that the postcolonial intellectual needs to approach it critically, identifying the ways in which apparently universal concepts carry the traces of particular, often colonial, power relations.

Khan's position is closest to the second of these views, though he refuses the simple inversion that would lead one to reject Western thought altogether in favor of a purely indigenous tradition. His approach is dialectical: he takes European philosophical and theoretical traditions seriously, reads them carefully, and uses them as tools for analysis, but he does so with a constant awareness of their historical situatedness and a constant readiness to push back against their more obviously ideological dimensions. This dialectical approach is itself, of course, a European philosophical technique, borrowed from Hegel and transformed by Marx, but Khan does not find this circularity embarrassing. One of his characteristic intellectual moves is to show how the tools of European critical thought can be turned against the assumptions of European dominance, how the logic of immanent critique can be applied not just to capitalism in the abstract but to the specific forms of colonialism and imperialism that have shaped the modern world.

2.2 The Marxist Foundation

Marxism is the bedrock of Khan's intellectual framework, but it is a Marxism that has been significantly modified by his engagement with other traditions. To understand this modified Marxism, we need to start with the basics.

Karl Marx's materialist philosophy begins with the premise that human beings are social animals who produce their means of subsistence through organized collective labor. The specific forms that this productive activity takes, the specific social relations into which people enter in order to produce, determine (in a complex and mediated way) the forms of consciousness, culture, law, and politics that characterize any given society. This is the core of the materialist conception of history, often summarized in Marx's famous formulation that it is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their social being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

For Khan, this basic Marxist insight provides the framework for analyzing Bangladeshi society and its intellectual life. The colonial history of Bengal, the specific character of the Bangladeshi economy (its dependence on remittances and the garment industry, its integration into global value chains, its post-colonial patterns of landholding and rural poverty), the class structure of Bangladeshi society (with its particular configurations of landed elites, urban professional classes, and rural and urban poor): all of these material conditions are, for Khan, the necessary starting point for any serious analysis of Bangladeshi culture, politics, and intellectual life.

But Khan does not rest content with the cruder versions of Marxist analysis that reduce culture and politics to mere reflections of economic base. He is aware, and his awareness is informed by decades of engagement with Western Marxist thought from Antonio Gramsci to the Frankfurt School, that the relationship between material conditions and cultural forms is complex, mediated, and not simply deterministic. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the idea that dominant classes maintain their power not just through coercion but through the cultivation of consent, through the production of a common sense that makes existing social arrangements seem natural and inevitable, is one of the tools Khan deploys most frequently. He uses it to analyze how the Bangladeshi state, its educational institutions, and its media produce and reproduce forms of consciousness that serve the interests of dominant classes while presenting themselves as universal and national.

Khan's Marxism is also deeply historical. He is interested not just in the structural features of capitalism in general but in the specific historical trajectories through which capitalist relations of production have developed in different parts of the world. The history of British colonialism in Bengal, the specific forms of primitive accumulation through which the colonial economy extracted wealth from the subcontinent, the ways in which colonial law and administration created new forms of property and new configurations of class power: these historical specifics are the material through which Khan works his theoretical analysis.

2.3 The Lacanian Turn: Desire, the Subject, and the Social

If Marxism provides the material foundation of Khan's thought, Lacanian psychoanalysis provides its vocabulary of subjectivity. The encounter between Marx and Lacan has been one of the most productive, and most contested, intellectual moves in twentieth-century critical theory, associated with figures like Louis Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, and the Lacanian Marxist tradition that Khan has drawn on and contributed to.

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychoanalyst whose influential reinterpretation of Freud transformed psychoanalysis into a structural theory of the subject. Where Freud had developed a primarily clinical theory of the unconscious, Lacan transformed it into a philosophical account of how human subjects are constituted through their entry into language and the symbolic order. For Lacan, the human subject is fundamentally split: divided between a conscious ego that imagines itself to be unified and self-present and an unconscious that is organized around desire, language, and the traces of early formative experiences. This split subject, whose desire is always and necessarily the desire of the Other (that is, desire structured by and through the social field, by language, by the expectations and demands of significant others), is the basic unit of Lacanian analysis.

Several key Lacanian concepts are indispensable for understanding Khan's work:

The Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary (RSI): Lacan organized his theory around three registers or orders of experience. The Imaginary is the register of images, identifications, and the ego, the dimension of experience in which the subject constructs a coherent image of itself and its world. The Symbolic is the register of language, law, and the social order, the dimension of experience structured by the signifier, by difference, by the rules and conventions that organize social life. The Real is the most difficult concept: it is that which resists symbolization, that which cannot be captured in language or image, the remainder or excess that is always left over after the symbolic and imaginary orders have done their work. For Lacan, the Real is associated with trauma, with *jouissance* (a kind of excessive enjoyment or drive satisfaction that goes beyond the pleasure principle), and with the fundamental impossibility that structures human desire.

The Name of the Father (or the Paternal Metaphor): For Lacan, the entry into the symbolic order is organized around what he calls the Name of the Father, a structural function (not necessarily performed by an actual father) that represents the law, prohibition, and the organization of desire. The Name of the Father establishes the subject's place in the symbolic order by separating it from an imagined state of fusion with the mother (understood as the primary other who apparently has or is the object of desire). This separation is experienced as a kind of loss, and it is this constitutive loss that sets desire in motion: desire is always the desire for something that was lost (or rather, that the subject imagines was lost), and it is this impossible object that Lacan calls the *objet petit a*.

The *objet petit a*: This untranslatable concept refers to the object-cause of desire, the object that appears to promise satisfaction but whose function is precisely to sustain desire rather than satisfy it. The *objet petit a* is not a real object in the world; it is a structural place-holder for the impossible satisfaction that the subject seeks. In Khan's political analysis, this concept proves useful for analyzing how political ideologies work by promising a satisfying wholeness (the unified nation, the just society, the pure religious community) that is structurally impossible to achieve, but whose promise keeps political desire alive.

Lack and the Subject: For Lacan, the subject is constituted by lack. The entry into language, into the symbolic order, involves a fundamental alienation: the subject must take up a place in the symbolic order that was already there before it, defined by others, organized by conventions and

laws that precede any individual. This alienation means that the subject is never fully at home in its own identity; it is always slightly beside itself, never quite coinciding with the image it has of itself or with the place that others have assigned it. This constitutive lack is not a pathology to be cured; it is the fundamental condition of human subjectivity.

For Khan, these Lacanian concepts provide a way of analyzing not just individual psychology but social and political phenomena. He uses them to analyze how nationalism works as an ideological formation (by offering imaginary wholeness to subjects whose experience is fundamentally one of lack and division), how religious extremism functions (by providing a fantasy of complete identity and pure belonging to subjects whose symbolic identifications are unstable), and how colonial subjects have internalized the colonial gaze in ways that produce a peculiarly colonized form of consciousness.

2.4 The Lacanian-Marxist Synthesis

The synthesis of Lacan and Marx is not an obvious or easy move. Marx was primarily interested in the social and historical conditions that produce consciousness; Lacan was primarily interested in the structural conditions that produce the subject through language. Marx's analysis operates at the level of social totality and historical process; Lacan's operates at the level of the individual subject and the structural logic of signification. To bring them together requires careful work.

The key move in the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis is to read each tradition through the lens of the other. Reading Marx through Lacan means attending to the ways in which economic categories (commodity, value, money, capital) function not just as descriptions of real economic processes but as symbolic structures that organize desire and subjectivity. The commodity, for instance, is not just an object with a use value and an exchange value; it is also an object that is invested with fantasy, that promises satisfaction, that functions, in a Lacanian sense, as a potential *objet petit a*. The famous "fetishism of commodities" that Marx describes in the opening chapters of *Capital*, the way in which social relations between people appear as relations between things, is, from a Lacanian perspective, a form of imaginary misrecognition in which the Real of social production is veiled by a symbolic-imaginary screen.

Reading Lacan through Marx means situating the structural logic of the subject, desire, and language within specific historical and social conditions. The forms that the symbolic order takes, the specific contents of the law, the particular configurations of prohibition and permission that organize desire in any given society, are not eternal or universal; they are historically produced and socially variable. The Name of the Father means something different in a feudal society than in a capitalist one, something different in a colonial society than in a metropolitan one, something different in a secular society than in a theocratic one.

Khan uses this synthesis to analyze Bangladeshi society and politics in ways that attend simultaneously to material conditions and to the psychic structures that those conditions produce and are produced by. When he analyzes the Liberation War of 1971, for instance, he is not just telling a political and military history; he is also analyzing the desires, the fantasies, the identifications, and the fears that animated the people who made that revolution and that continue to shape the collective memory and political culture of Bangladesh. When he analyzes

the persistence of communalism (religious-communal identity politics) in Bangladesh, he is not just describing a social phenomenon; he is analyzing the specific forms of lack, desire, and fantasy that make communal identification psychically attractive to subjects whose symbolic anchoring in other forms of identity (national, class, professional) is precarious.

2.5 Freud and the Foundations

To understand Khan's use of Lacan, it is necessary first to understand Freud, since Lacan presented himself (controversially, but with some justice) as returning to the real Freud against the ego-psychological distortions that had corrupted American psychoanalysis. Khan has engaged with Freud directly and extensively, and his book *Freud Porar Bhumika* (Introduction to Reading Freud) represents his most sustained effort to introduce Freudian thought to Bangladeshi readers.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is, of course, one of the most influential and contested thinkers in the history of ideas. His core theoretical contributions, the concept of the unconscious, the theory of drives, the analysis of dreams, the clinical technique of free association, the structural model of the psyche (id, ego, superego), and the various mechanisms of defense (repression, projection, displacement, condensation, sublimation), have transformed how educated people in the modern world think about human psychology, even as the empirical status of many of his specific claims remains disputed.

For Khan, Freud's most important contribution is not any specific empirical claim but rather a fundamental shift in perspective: the insistence that human behavior and culture are shaped by processes that are not fully available to conscious awareness, that the surface of social life conceals depths that can only be reached through careful, patient, and sometimes painful interpretive work. This epistemological claim, that things are not what they appear to be, that the manifest content of any cultural or social phenomenon conceals a latent content that is its real meaning, is the methodological foundation of Khan's critical practice.

Several Freudian concepts appear with particular frequency in Khan's work:

Repression and the Return of the Repressed: Freud argued that the psyche maintains its equilibrium by pushing anxiety-provoking material into the unconscious, but that this material does not simply disappear; it returns in disguised forms, in symptoms, dreams, slips of the tongue, and various other manifestations. For Khan, this concept provides a model for understanding how societies deal with traumatic historical events. The traumatic history of the Bangladesh Liberation War, including the mass killings, the systematic rape of women, and the subsequent failure of the post-independence state to deliver on its promises, has, in Khan's analysis, been subject to various forms of social repression, and its return in unexpected forms, including communal violence, political extremism, and the periodic eruption of mass protest movements, can be understood through the Freudian lens of the return of the repressed.

The Death Drive: Freud's late theoretical innovation, the positing of a fundamental drive toward dissolution, repetition, and ultimately death (*Thanatos*) alongside the life-affirming pleasure principle (*Eros*), is a concept that Khan finds particularly useful for analyzing the seemingly self-

destructive dimensions of political life in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Why do people vote for politicians who will harm them? Why do social movements destroy themselves through internal conflict? Why does revolutionary energy so often dissipate into reaction? The death drive provides a frame for thinking about these phenomena.

Civilization and Its Discontents: Freud's late cultural text, in which he argues that civilization necessarily involves the renunciation of drives, and that this renunciation produces a chronic background of discontent that is the price of social life, provides Khan with a framework for analyzing the relationship between the individual and the social order. The Bangladeshi state, like all states, demands renunciation from its subjects (renunciation of violence, of antisocial desires, of claims that might threaten social order), and this demand generates resentment, discontent, and the periodic impulse toward transgression.

2.6 Continental Philosophy: From Hegel to Foucault

Khan's philosophical formation is not limited to Marx and Lacan. He has engaged extensively with the broader tradition of Continental philosophy, and several figures deserve special mention.

Hegel: Although Khan is a materialist who would reject Hegel's idealism, Hegel's dialectical method is foundational for his thought. The idea that contradictions are the engine of historical change, that every position generates its negation, and that the result of this dialectical conflict is not a simple synthesis but a transformation that preserves and transforms both the original position and its negation, is a logical structure that Khan employs constantly. His analysis of Bangladeshi nationalism, for instance, is dialectical: he sees in it both a genuine anti-colonial impulse (which is its positive moment) and a tendency toward chauvinism, exclusivism, and the reproduction of colonial hierarchies in new forms (which is its negation), and he is interested in how these contradictory dimensions work themselves out in the actual history of the country.

Walter Benjamin: The German-Jewish philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) is a figure whom Khan has cited and discussed at length. Benjamin's distinctive contribution to Marxist thought includes his analysis of the relationship between culture, technology, and politics (in essays like "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"), his concept of the dialectical image (in which past and present flash together in a moment of historical recognition), and his insistence on attending to the experiences of the defeated and the oppressed in history rather than simply narrating the story of the victors. Benjamin's famous "Theses on the Philosophy of History," written in the last year of his life as he was fleeing the Nazi occupation of France, with its image of the "angel of history" blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress, is a text that resonates deeply with Khan's own sense of the relationship between memory, trauma, and political hope.

Michel Foucault: The French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is another major point of reference in Khan's work, though also a target of critical scrutiny. Foucault's analyses of the relationships between knowledge and power, his genealogical method of tracing the historical conditions under which particular regimes of truth are established and sustained, his accounts of the disciplinary mechanisms through which modern states produce docile bodies

and normalized subjects, all of these are tools that Khan has borrowed and put to work in his analysis of colonial and postcolonial formations. But Khan is also aware of the tensions between Foucault's analytics of power and the more classical Marxist problematic of ideology and class domination, and his engagement with Foucault is consistently dialectical rather than simply reverential.

Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: The Palestinian-American literary critic and public intellectual Edward Said (1935-2003) is, alongside Frantz Fanon, the postcolonial theorist whose work has most directly shaped Khan's engagement with questions of colonialism, representation, and power. Said's concept of Orientalism, developed in his 1978 book of the same name, describes the systematic production of knowledge about the "Orient" by Western scholars, travelers, and administrators that served, he argued, to construct the Orient as an object of knowledge available for Western contemplation and control. This concept of Orientalism, understood as a discourse in Foucault's sense, a system of knowledge/power that produces its object rather than simply describing a pre-existing reality, has been enormously influential in postcolonial studies, and Khan has drawn on it in his analyses of how Bangladesh and the broader South Asian region have been represented in Western academic and journalistic discourse.

2.7 Frantz Fanon: The Psychopolitics of Decolonization

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) deserves special treatment, because he is perhaps the single most important intellectual influence on Khan's political thought. Fanon was a Martinican psychiatrist and revolutionary who joined the Algerian independence struggle and wrote two major works: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). These books represent the most powerful attempt to think through simultaneously the psychological and the political dimensions of colonialism and decolonization.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon analyzed the psychic damage inflicted by colonialism on colonized subjects. His central argument is that colonialism does not simply exploit the bodies and labor of colonized people; it also colonizes their minds, their self-perceptions, their desires, and their cultural identifications. The colonized subject is forced to see himself through the eyes of the colonizer, to experience his own culture and language as inferior, to desire the things that the colonizer desires (including, at the psychological level, to desire to be the colonizer). This produces a characteristic split in the colonized consciousness: a self-alienation in which the colonized subject is estranged from his own experience, his own culture, and his own people.

The Wretched of the Earth developed these psychological insights in a more explicitly political register, analyzing the dynamics of colonial violence, the psychology of national liberation movements, and the dangers of what Fanon called the "pitfalls of national consciousness": the tendency of postcolonial ruling classes to replicate the forms of colonial domination while changing only the faces of the dominators. Fanon's warning that political independence without genuine social transformation merely substitutes a national bourgeoisie for the colonial power is one that Khan returns to repeatedly in his analysis of Bangladeshi politics.

What makes Fanon particularly valuable for Khan is the way in which he combines psychoanalytic and Marxist insights without simply subordinating one to the other. Fanon's colonial subject is simultaneously a material being whose suffering can be analyzed in class terms and a psychic being whose inner life is shaped by the specific dynamics of racialized colonial domination. This synthesis, rougher and more urgent than the theoretical syntheses developed by Lacan or Althusser, is close to Khan's own practice.

The influence of Fanon was dramatically visible in Khan's public activities in 2024, when he cited Fanon's dictum that "there comes a time when silence becomes dishonesty" to explain his decision to speak out publicly against the Hasina government during the student uprising that swept Bangladesh. This moment, in which a theoretical concept from a Martinican intellectual writing about Algeria in the 1950s became immediately relevant to the political situation in Bangladesh in 2024, is itself a demonstration of one of Khan's central arguments: that the colonial and postcolonial condition is a shared condition, that the experiences and insights of people in very different parts of the world illuminate each other.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DOCTORAL FORMATION: CENTRAL BANKING, MONEY, AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

3.1 The Economic Turn: Why a Lacanian Marxist Studies Central Banking

It is at first glance surprising that someone who would become known as a Lacanian cultural theorist and postcolonial critic wrote his doctoral dissertation on the history of central banking in England in the nineteenth century. The surprise diminishes when we understand the intellectual context of The New School in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and when we understand what kind of economic history Khan was actually writing.

The New School's economics department, under figures like Duncan K. Foley (Khan's supervisor), was one of the few places in the American academy where heterodox and Marxist approaches to economics were pursued with rigorous scholarly standards. Foley himself was (and remains) one of the most distinguished heterodox economists in the world, known for his work on complexity economics, on Marxist value theory, and on the analysis of financial systems. His supervision of Khan's dissertation placed the latter's historical research within a tradition of critical political economy that was deeply informed by both classical Marxist theory and by more recent developments in monetary theory and financial economics.

The period Khan studied, 1793 to 1877, encompasses some of the most dramatic and consequential developments in the history of capitalism and in the history of economic thought. The beginning of this period coincides with the suspension of gold payments by the Bank of England during the Napoleonic Wars, a crisis that provoked the famous Bullionist Controversy about the nature of money and the causes of inflation. The end of the period coincides with the establishment of the gold standard as the organizing principle of the international monetary system. In between, the period includes the Banking Acts of 1844 and 1845 (which established the framework within which the Bank of England operated for most of the nineteenth century),

the financial crises of 1825, 1847, 1857, and 1866, and the great theoretical debates between the Currency School and the Banking School about the proper basis of monetary policy.

3.2 The Currency School and the Banking School: A Theoretical Debate with Lasting Consequences

The debate between the Currency School and the Banking School that Khan studied in his dissertation is not merely an episode in the history of economic thought. It is a debate about fundamental questions in monetary theory and macroeconomic policy that have never been definitively resolved and that continue to shape contemporary debates about central banking, quantitative easing, cryptocurrency, and the proper role of financial institutions in a market economy.

The Currency School, associated with figures like David Ricardo (in his later monetary writings) and Robert Torrens, argued that the amount of paper money in circulation should be regulated strictly in accordance with the rules that would apply to a purely metallic (gold) currency. Their central claim was that the value of money depends on its quantity, and that the Bank of England should therefore expand or contract the note issue precisely in line with changes in the gold reserve. This position was enshrined in the Bank Charter Act of 1844, which divided the Bank of England into two departments (the Banking Department and the Issue Department), required that note issues beyond a fixed amount be backed one for one by gold, and thus attempted to create an automatic mechanism for regulating the money supply.

The Banking School, associated with figures like Thomas Tooke, John Fullarton, and (in a more complex way) John Stuart Mill, argued against this mechanistic approach. Their key insight was that banking is not simply the issuing of notes but the creation of credit more broadly, and that the quantity of credit in circulation is determined not by the central bank's decisions but by the demand for credit from the business community. The principle of "real bills" (the idea that bank credit is automatically appropriate when it is based on genuine commercial transactions) suggested that the banking system naturally regulates itself: credit expands when business activity expands and contracts when it contracts, without need for external intervention.

Khan's analysis of this debate, conducted through the lens of Marxist political economy, allows him to identify the class interests that each position represented and to situate the theoretical arguments within the broader context of capital accumulation, financial crises, and the development of the capitalist state. The Currency School's position served the interests of those who sought monetary stability above all else (including those with financial assets whose real value would be eroded by inflation), while the Banking School's position was more sympathetic to the needs of commercial capital, which required flexible access to credit in order to manage the uncertainties of market competition.

The lasting significance of this debate for Khan's broader intellectual project is that it establishes a model for analyzing how apparently technical questions (about money, credit, and monetary policy) are in fact deeply political questions, questions about the distribution of power and resources in society, about whose interests the state will serve, and about how the apparently neutral mechanisms of the market obscure the social relations of production and domination that

they embody. This insight, that technical and economic questions are always also political questions, runs throughout Khan's subsequent work.

3.3 The Bank of England and the Colonial State

There is another dimension of Khan's doctoral research that connects more directly to his postcolonial concerns: the relationship between the Bank of England and the colonial system of the British Empire. The Bank of England was not just the central bank of England; it was, in important ways, the financial hub around which the entire British colonial system was organized. The flow of capital between the metropolis and the colonies, the management of colonial debt, the mechanisms through which surplus value extracted from colonial labor and resources was channeled back to London: all of these processes ran through or were organized in relation to the Bank of England and the broader financial system centered on the City of London.

Understanding the history of central banking in England is therefore, in part, understanding how the financial infrastructure of colonialism was built and maintained. For Khan, this connection between the technical history of monetary institutions and the broader history of colonial exploitation is not incidental; it is central to his project of understanding how colonialism operated through apparently neutral and technical mechanisms as well as through overt violence and political domination.

This insight connects to what later Marxist and postcolonial theorists have called "the colonial mode of production," the specific forms of economic exploitation that characterized colonial economies and that differed from the forms of exploitation in metropolitan capitalist economies. The plantation system in the Caribbean, the forced labor arrangements in much of Africa, the zamindari (landlord) system in Bengal: these were not simply backward survivals from pre-capitalist modes of production; they were specific forms of production that served the needs of metropolitan capital, and they were created and maintained through the institutional mechanisms of colonial law, colonial finance, and colonial administration.

3.4 Duncan K. Foley and the Heterodox Economics Tradition

Khan's supervisor at The New School, Duncan K. Foley, is a figure who deserves more than a passing mention, because his intellectual influence on Khan extends beyond the specific topic of the doctoral dissertation. Foley is one of the most creative and wide-ranging economists of his generation, with contributions to complexity economics, to the mathematical formalization of Marxist value theory, and to the analysis of financial markets. His work has consistently combined technical sophistication in economic modeling with a commitment to critical political economy that refuses to treat economic categories as natural or given.

Foley's work on Marxist value theory, in particular, provides a framework for understanding how the apparently quantitative and technical concepts of economic theory (price, profit, rate of return, interest rate) embody and conceal qualitative social relations. His "new interpretation" of Marx's labor theory of value, developed in collaboration with Gerard Dumenil, offered a way of reconciling Marx's theoretical claims with observed price data without abandoning the core insight that value is created by human labor. This technical work in economic theory connects to

Khan's broader project of analyzing how apparently neutral economic categories mystify social relations.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LEGAL DIMENSION: JURISPRUDENCE, COLONIAL LAW, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE

4.1 Law as a Site of Colonial Inscription

Khan's legal education, as we have already noted, gave him analytical tools that he has used throughout his career. But it also gave him a specific set of objects of analysis: the institutions and doctrines of law itself. For Khan, law is not simply a technical domain to be studied for its own sake but a fundamental site through which colonial power was exercised and through which it continues to operate in the postcolonial present.

The legal system of Bangladesh is, in its basic structure, the legal system of British India. The codes, the procedures, the institutions, and, to a very significant extent, the legal culture and the legal profession of Bangladesh were formed under British colonial rule and have been only partially transformed in the decades since independence. The Indian Penal Code (1860), the Code of Civil Procedure (1908), the Code of Criminal Procedure (1898), the Evidence Act (1872): these and other pieces of colonial legislation continue to form the backbone of the legal system of Bangladesh, modified but not replaced by subsequent legislation. Understanding the legal system of Bangladesh requires understanding the colonial legal project that produced it.

British colonial law in India was never simply a transplant of English law. It was a distinctive hybrid formation, produced by the encounter between English legal ideas and the complex reality of Indian society (with its multiple religious communities, its hierarchical social structures, its varied regional traditions, and its existing systems of local governance and dispute resolution). The British colonial legal project involved both the codification of existing Indian customs and practices (often in ways that froze and distorted those practices) and the introduction of new legal categories and institutions derived from English law. The result was a complex, often contradictory, and always politically charged system of rules and institutions that served the interests of colonial administration and colonial capital while appearing to offer impartial justice to all subjects.

4.2 Personal Law, Communalism, and the Colonial Legal Legacy

One of the most significant and most problematic dimensions of the colonial legal legacy in Bangladesh (and in India and Pakistan) is the system of personal law, under which questions of family relations (marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption) are regulated by different laws for different religious communities. This system, which gives Muslim personal law to Muslims, Hindu personal law to Hindus, and Christian personal law to Christians, was a deliberate product of British colonial policy. The British, seeking to minimize resistance from traditional religious authorities, preserved existing systems of personal law rather than attempting to create a unified, secular family law applicable to all subjects.

This decision had enormous consequences for subsequent history. By codifying religious identity as a legal category, the British colonial state gave communal (religion-based) identity a legal significance that it had not previously had in the same form. The legal differentiation of communities by religion created incentives for people to define and defend their communal identities in legal terms, contributed to the hardening of communal boundaries, and provided a structural basis for the communal politics that culminated in the partition of 1947 and that continues to shape political life in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan to this day.

Khan's analysis of communalism in Bangladesh consistently returns to this colonial legal legacy as one of the key structural conditions for the persistence of communal conflict. He does not see communalism as an expression of some primordial religious identity that was always there, waiting to be mobilized. He sees it as a historically produced phenomenon, shaped by colonial legal structures, by the political manipulations of colonial administrators who used the policy of divide and rule, and by the class interests of elites who found communal mobilization a useful tool for managing popular discontent. This historical and structural analysis of communalism, informed by his legal training, distinguishes Khan's approach from those who treat communal violence as simply the expression of irrational prejudice or ancient hatreds.

4.3 Constitutional Law and the Foundations of the Bangladeshi State

Khan has also engaged extensively with the constitutional law of Bangladesh, and in particular with the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972, which was promulgated in the first year of the country's independence. His analysis of this constitution is characteristically dialectical: he sees in it both genuine achievements and fundamental contradictions that have shaped the subsequent political history of the country.

The 1972 constitution was, in many ways, a remarkable document for its time. It established a parliamentary system of government, enshrined fundamental rights, committed the state to a set of "fundamental principles of state policy" that included socialism, democracy, nationalism, and secularism, and explicitly prohibited parties based on religion from participating in politics. It was a constitution shaped by the progressive and secular-nationalist ideals of the Liberation War movement, and it reflected the hope that independent Bangladesh would break decisively with the communal and authoritarian politics of the Pakistan period.

But Khan's analysis identifies a series of contradictions and limitations in the 1972 constitution that have contributed to the subsequent instability of Bangladesh's political system. He has argued, most notably, that the constitution did not adequately incorporate the actual spirit of the Liberation War, that the founding document of the state failed to reflect the genuine aspirations of the people who made the revolution. This is a provocative claim that has generated considerable debate, and understanding it requires understanding what Khan means by "the spirit of the Liberation War."

For Khan, the Liberation War of 1971 was not simply a nationalist movement for political independence from Pakistan. It was, more fundamentally, a movement for social justice, for equality, and for human dignity. The three principles that Khan identifies as the foundations of the Liberation War are equality, human dignity, and social justice, and he argues that these

principles commit the new state to a form of social transformation that goes well beyond the formal political equality guaranteed by a liberal constitution. A constitution that established formal political democracy while leaving the social and economic inequalities of Bangladesh's deeply stratified society intact failed, in Khan's view, to honor the revolutionary promises of the Liberation War.

4.4 Legal Positivism, Natural Law, and the Question of Justice

Khan's engagement with legal philosophy is not limited to the historical and political analysis of specific legal institutions. He is also engaged with the fundamental questions of jurisprudence: What is law? What is the relationship between law and justice? What is the basis of legal authority? These questions have preoccupied legal philosophers since antiquity, and they remain fiercely contested.

The dominant tradition in twentieth-century jurisprudence has been legal positivism, associated with figures like H. L. A. Hart and Hans Kelsen. Legal positivism holds that law is a social fact: it is simply whatever the relevant social institutions (legislatures, courts, administrative agencies) say it is, and its validity as law is independent of its moral merit or its conformity to any external standard of justice. This view has the virtue of clarity and it provides a basis for the rule of law in pluralistic societies where moral consensus is absent, but it has the weakness of being unable to account for the intuition that some laws are simply unjust, that the Nuremberg laws of Nazi Germany were laws (in the positivist sense) but that something important is lost if we fail to distinguish them from just laws.

Against legal positivism, the natural law tradition holds that there is a higher law, whether divine, rational, or natural in some other sense, to which positive law must conform if it is to have genuine legal authority. On this view, an unjust law is no law at all, and citizens may be morally obligated to disobey it. The natural law tradition has its roots in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, was developed extensively in medieval Christian thought, and was given a characteristically modern form by philosophers like John Locke and Immanuel Kant.

Khan's position on these jurisprudential questions is informed by his Marxist framework. He is skeptical of natural law theories that ground legal authority in eternal rational principles or divine commandments, because he sees these claims as typically concealing class interests behind a facade of universality. But he is equally skeptical of pure legal positivism, because it provides no resources for criticizing unjust law. His approach is closer to what might be called a critical legal theory: an approach that sees law as a site of struggle and contradiction, in which dominant interests are typically encoded but in which subordinate groups can also find resources for resistance and transformation.

4.5 Human Rights: Universal Claims and Particular Histories

The question of human rights is one to which Khan has returned repeatedly, in the context of his analysis of the Liberation War, of communal violence, of the treatment of minorities, and of the political repression that has characterized much of Bangladesh's post-independence history. Human rights discourse raises some of the most difficult questions in contemporary legal and

political philosophy: Are human rights genuinely universal, or are they a specifically Western cultural product that is being imposed on non-Western societies under the guise of universality? What is the foundation of human rights claims, and why should they be regarded as binding? How are rights to be enforced in a world of sovereign states?

Khan's engagement with these questions is characteristically dialectical. He is committed to the substantive values that human rights discourse expresses: the dignity and equality of all human beings, the prohibition of torture and cruel treatment, the right to participate in the political life of one's community, the rights to education, healthcare, and an adequate standard of living. But he is also acutely aware of the ways in which human rights discourse has been weaponized by Western powers to justify intervention in the internal affairs of developing countries, to subject those countries to a form of surveillance and normative judgment that is not applied to the Western powers themselves, and to provide ideological cover for policies that actually undermine the social and economic conditions under which rights can be effectively exercised.

His analysis here draws on Talal Asad, the Syrian-American anthropologist whose work Khan has engaged with directly, and who has written critically about the genealogy of human rights discourse and its relationship to the specifically Christian and European tradition of moral universalism. Khan's engagement with Asad extends his critique of Western claims to universality beyond the economic domain into the domain of law and morality.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE HISTORICAL VISION: BENGAL, PARTITION, AND THE MAKING OF BANGLADESH

5.1 The Long History of Bengal

Any adequate understanding of Salimullah Khan's work requires a substantial engagement with the history of Bengal, because for Khan, the present is always constituted by its relationship to the past, and the political and cultural questions of contemporary Bangladesh can only be properly understood against the long backdrop of Bengali history. This is not a simple antiquarian interest; it is a methodological commitment rooted in his Marxist and Benjaminian conviction that the past is not dead and buried but continues to live in and through the contradictions of the present.

Bengal has one of the oldest continuous literate traditions of any region in South Asia. The Bengali language, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family, has a documented history going back to at least the eighth or ninth century of the Common Era, in the Charyapada, a collection of Buddhist philosophical songs that are the earliest examples of what we can recognize as Bengali literature. The region that is now Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal has been home to a series of major civilizations, including the ancient kingdom of Vanga, the Gupta Empire, the Buddhist Pala dynasty, and various successor states, before the coming of Islam in the thirteenth century with the Turkish military conquest of Bengal by Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji.

The coming of Islam to Bengal transformed the region in profound ways. The conversion to Islam of a large proportion of the Bengali population (primarily, though not exclusively, from the lower castes and the rural poor) produced a distinctive Bengali Muslim culture that was simultaneously rooted in local Bengali traditions and connected to the broader Islamic world. This culture was different from the Arabic Islam of the Middle East, different from the Persian-influenced Islam of North India, and different from the Hinduism that continued to be practiced by a significant minority of the Bengali population. It was a syncretic culture in which elements from different traditions were woven together in ways that defied simple categorization.

Khan's engagement with this history is not simply descriptive; it is critically motivated. He is interested in the Bengali Muslim tradition as a resource for understanding the possibilities and the limitations of the political and cultural formations that have emerged in Bangladesh. He writes about Lalon Shah, the eighteenth-century mystic and folk singer whose songs express a philosophy of radical religious egalitarianism and who rejected the formal boundaries of religious communities, as an ancestor of a distinctively Bengali approach to spiritual and cultural life that transcends the Hindu-Muslim binary that British colonialism hardened into a political antagonism. He writes about Kazi Nazrul Islam, the poet who became the National Poet of Bangladesh, as an anti-colonial and democratic thinker who drew on both Islamic and Hindu traditions to create a poetry of popular emancipation. And he writes about the Bengali language itself as the primary medium through which this cultural synthesis was achieved and preserved.

5.2 The British Colonial Transformation of Bengal

The entry of the British East India Company into Bengal in the eighteenth century, and the establishment of formal British colonial rule following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, initiated one of the most dramatic social, economic, and cultural transformations in South Asian history. Khan's understanding of this transformation is shaped by his Marxist political economy and by his engagement with postcolonial theory, and it differs in important ways from both the celebratory accounts of British colonialism that were common in an earlier era and from certain nationalist historiographies that reduce the colonial period to simple exploitation and resistance.

For Khan, the British colonial transformation of Bengal was above all an economic transformation, a restructuring of the productive relations and social organization of the region in the interests of metropolitan capital. The key mechanisms of this economic transformation included the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which created a class of permanent landlords (zamindars) with secure property rights in land at the cost of dispossessing those who actually cultivated the land; the destruction of the traditional textile industry of Bengal through the flooding of Indian markets with cheap machine-made cloth from English factories; the forced cultivation of indigo and other export crops for the metropolitan market; and the systematic extraction of revenue through taxation and transfer that resulted in the flow of capital from Bengal to England that has been described as the "drain of wealth."

These economic transformations had profound social consequences. The destruction of the traditional artisan economy produced mass impoverishment and forced rural migration. The creation of a new landlord class produced a hierarchy of landlord and tenant that was both economically exploitative and socially degrading. The introduction of English legal institutions

and the English language created a new educated elite (what Marx called the "baboo" class and what has been more sympathetically described as the Bengali *bhadralok* or "respectable people") that was positioned as intermediaries between the colonial state and the mass of the population, and whose cultural orientation was profoundly shaped by this intermediate position.

Khan's analysis of the *bhadralok* (though he uses the broader category of the colonial educated elite rather than this specifically Bengali term) is one of the sharpest and most controversial dimensions of his work. He argues that this class, which produced most of the intellectual and political leadership of Bengali nationalism and of the independence movements of the twentieth century, was marked from the beginning by a fundamental ambivalence: it sought to displace the British colonizers from power, but it also internalized many of the colonial assumptions about culture, language, and civilization, and it aspired to replace British rule with its own rule over the masses rather than with the self-governance of the people as a whole.

5.3 The Bengal Renaissance and Its Contradictions

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a remarkable intellectual and cultural movement in Calcutta that has been called the Bengal Renaissance. Associated with figures like Ram Mohan Roy (the reformer who challenged the practice of *sati* and championed women's education), Debendranath Tagore (founder of the Brahmo Samaj), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (whose novels shaped the imagination of Bengali nationalism), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (who championed the rights of widows and promoted Bengali prose), and above all Rabindranath Tagore (the Nobel laureate poet, novelist, playwright, and philosopher who towered over Bengali culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the Bengal Renaissance represented a genuine intellectual flowering in response to the challenges and opportunities of the colonial encounter.

Khan's attitude toward the Bengal Renaissance is characteristically ambivalent. He recognizes the genuine intellectual achievements of this period and the real contribution it made to the modernization of Bengali culture. He is particularly interested in Rabindranath Tagore, to whose work he has devoted an entire edited volume (*Gariber Rabindranath*), and his reading of Tagore is sophisticated and non-hagiographic: he sees Tagore as a genuinely complex thinker whose ideas about culture, education, and international relations were often ahead of his time, but also a thinker shaped by class position and the cultural horizons of the *bhadralok* world.

But Khan also emphasizes the limitations and contradictions of the Bengal Renaissance. He notes that it was primarily a Hindu upper-caste phenomenon, that it largely excluded the Muslim population of Bengal (who constituted a majority, especially in the eastern part of the region that would become Bangladesh), that it was deeply shaped by the colonial educational system that it was supposed to be responding critically to, and that its nationalism was often a nationalism of the educated elite rather than of the mass of the Bengali people. These limitations meant that the Bengal Renaissance, for all its achievements, failed to create the kind of inclusive, democratic cultural movement that could have provided the basis for a genuinely emancipatory Bengali politics.

5.4 Partition, 1947: The Catastrophe and Its Long Aftermath

The Partition of British India in 1947, which divided the subcontinent into the independent states of India and Pakistan (with Bengal divided into Indian West Bengal and Pakistani East Bengal, later East Pakistan), was one of the greatest catastrophes in South Asian history. The mass violence that accompanied Partition, in which somewhere between 200,000 and two million people were killed (depending on the estimates one accepts) and up to fifteen million were displaced, left wounds that have still not healed.

Khan's analysis of Partition is shaped by his materialist historical method and by his postcolonial theoretical framework. He locates the primary responsibility for Partition not in some essential conflict between Hindus and Muslims (a claim that he sees as naturalizing what was in fact a historically produced antagonism) but in the specific political and administrative choices made by the colonial state and by the leadership of the major political parties (the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League) in the critical years before independence. The "divide and rule" policies of the British administration, the communalization of political representation through separate electorates for different religious communities (introduced in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 and extended in subsequent constitutional legislation), and the failure of the Congress leadership to make a credible commitment to the rights of the Muslim minority: all of these contributed to creating the conditions under which partition seemed the only solution to the communal problem.

But Khan's analysis does not simply assign blame. It is more interested in understanding the structural conditions, the class interests, the ideological formations, and the political processes through which Partition came about, in order to understand why communalism remains a powerful force in South Asian politics today and what might be done to address it. The key insight is that communalism is not a natural or inevitable expression of religious difference but a political formation that serves specific class interests and that can be analyzed, criticized, and potentially overcome.

5.5 East Pakistan and the Emergence of Bengali Nationalism

The creation of Pakistan in 1947 produced, relatively quickly, a new crisis. Pakistan was conceived as a Muslim homeland, a state in which the Muslim majority of the subcontinent would have political sovereignty and security from Hindu-dominated India. But it was from the beginning a geographically and culturally divided state: West Pakistan and East Pakistan were separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory, they had different languages (Urdu and Bengali respectively), different historical traditions, different economic structures, and very different populations.

The Muslim League leadership that took control of Pakistan was predominantly drawn from the Urdu-speaking Muslim elites of North India, people who had emigrated from India to the new state of Pakistan and who brought with them their own cultural assumptions, their own political interests, and their own version of what Pakistani national identity should look like. This leadership imposed Urdu as the sole national language of Pakistan, in defiance of the fact that Bengali was spoken by the majority of the Pakistani population (who lived in East Pakistan). This linguistic imposition was experienced by Bengalis not just as a cultural slight but as a

political and economic measure designed to disadvantage them in competition for government jobs, educational opportunities, and political power.

The Language Movement of 1952, in which students and others in Dhaka took to the streets to demand recognition of Bengali as a state language of Pakistan, and in which police fired into a crowd of demonstrators on February 21, killing several people (who became known as the Language Martyrs), was the founding event of Bengali nationalism in what is now Bangladesh. February 21 is commemorated as Language Martyrs' Day and, since 1999, as International Mother Language Day. The Language Movement was the first major challenge to the Pakistani political settlement, and it established the terms of the conflict that would culminate in the Liberation War of 1971.

Khan's analysis of the Language Movement is multi-layered. At the most basic level, he sees it as a genuine popular revolt against colonial imposition, a refusal by the Bengali majority to accept the cultural subordination that the Pakistani state was demanding. But he also sees it as an early expression of what would become the central political question of East Pakistan: the question of whether the Bengali Muslim population would define themselves primarily in terms of their religion (as the Muslim League formula required) or primarily in terms of their language and culture. The Language Movement was a powerful argument for the primacy of language and culture over religion as the basis of political identity, and it set East Pakistan on a trajectory that would eventually lead to independence.

But Khan is also attentive to the class dimensions of the Language Movement and of Bengali nationalism more broadly. The leadership of the movement was drawn from the educated urban middle class, from students and intellectuals at the University of Dhaka and other institutions. The mass of the rural Bengali population, though supportive of the movement, was not its primary agent. And the subsequent development of Bengali nationalism, through the Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the political struggles of the 1960s, was shaped by the interests and the limitations of this middle-class nationalist leadership.

5.6 The Liberation War of 1971: Revolution, Genocide, and the Question of Justice

The Liberation War of 1971 is the defining event of Bangladeshi national identity, and it is a subject to which Khan has devoted extensive analysis. His book *Behat Biplab 1971* (The Derailed Revolution: 1971), the title itself indicating his central thesis, is his most sustained engagement with the history and significance of the Liberation War.

The war began after the Pakistani military launched a brutal crackdown on March 25, 1971, in response to the refusal of the Pakistani political establishment to accept the results of the 1970 general elections, in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League had won an overwhelming majority. Operation Searchlight, as the military crackdown was called, was accompanied by massacres of civilians, systematic rape of women (estimated in the tens of thousands), and the targeting of Hindu minorities and of the educated Bengali elite. The violence of the Pakistani military in 1971 has been described as genocide, and the question of whether it constituted genocide in the international legal sense has been a subject of ongoing scholarly and political debate.

The Liberation War lasted nine months, ending in December 1971 with the surrender of the Pakistani military forces to the combined forces of the Mukti Bahini (the Bangladesh liberation forces) and the Indian Army, which intervened in early December in support of the liberation movement. The Indian intervention was decisive militarily, but it also complicated the political meaning of the war: was Bangladesh's independence an achievement of its own people, or was it a gift from India? This question, which Khan addresses directly in his work, has continued to shape Bangladesh-India relations and to influence Bangladeshi political culture.

Khan's central argument in *Behat Biplab 1971*, captured in the title's description of the revolution as "derailed," is that the Liberation War contained within it the seeds of a genuine social revolution, a transformation not just of the political surface but of the deep structures of Bangladeshi society, that was never allowed to flower. The three principles he identifies as foundational to the Liberation War, equality, human dignity, and social justice, are principles that point toward a transformation of the class structure, the property relations, and the cultural norms of Bangladeshi society that went far beyond what the post-independence Awami League government was willing to implement. The revolution was "derailed" by the class interests of the national bourgeoisie that came to power after independence, which preferred to consolidate its own position rather than to implement the radical social transformation that the revolutionary moment had made possible.

This argument has been controversial, and Khan has had to defend it against critics from various directions: from those who argue that the Liberation War was simply a nationalist movement with no inherent socialist content, from those who argue that the subsequent failures of Bangladeshi politics were caused by external interference rather than internal class conflict, and from those who see his critique of the post-independence leadership as insufficiently appreciative of the genuine achievements of the Mujib government. Khan's response to these critics has consistently been to insist on the importance of historical specificity: to analyze what actually happened, what was possible and what was not, and why the revolutionary potential of 1971 was ultimately contained and redirected rather than fulfilled.

5.7 The Question of War Crimes and the Shahbagh Movement

One of the most controversial dimensions of the politics of 1971 in Bangladesh is the question of war crimes: the crimes committed by the Pakistani military and their collaborators (including the Razakars and Al-Badr paramilitary forces organized under the auspices of the Jamaat-e-Islami) during the Liberation War. This question has been politically contested since 1971, and it was not until 2010 that the Bangladeshi state established the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) to try those accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide during the conflict.

Khan was a prominent supporter of the war crimes trial, and he came out strongly in favor of the Shahbagh Movement of 2013, which was a mass popular movement in Bangladesh demanding the death penalty for those convicted by the ICT. The Shahbagh Movement was the largest spontaneous mass mobilization in Bangladesh since 1971, and it expressed a profound popular demand for justice for the victims of the Liberation War. Khan's support for the movement was consistent with his broader analysis of the Liberation War: if the promise of the Liberation War

was equality, human dignity, and social justice, then justice for the victims of the war crimes committed in 1971 was a necessary element of fulfilling that promise.

But the Shahbagh Movement was also controversial, and its aftermath raised difficult questions that Khan has continued to grapple with. Critics argued that the movement was manipulated by the Awami League government to advance its own political interests, that the ICT's procedures fell short of international standards for fair trials, and that the death sentences handed down were a form of judicial vengeance rather than genuine justice. These criticisms raised the profound question of what justice means in the aftermath of mass atrocity: whether retributive justice (punishing the perpetrators) is sufficient, or whether justice requires also transformative justice (addressing the underlying conditions that made the atrocities possible and ensuring that they cannot recur).

CHAPTER SIX: LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

6.1 The Language Question: Bengali as Medium, Bengali as Medium of Liberation

No issue is closer to the center of Salimullah Khan's intellectual and political commitments than the question of the Bengali language and its role in Bangladeshi education and public life. This might seem like a narrow, parochial concern, but in Khan's analysis it opens out into a set of fundamental questions about colonialism, decolonization, knowledge, and power that are relevant far beyond Bangladesh.

The argument that Khan makes, in its simplest form, is this: the Bengali language is not merely a vehicle for communication; it is the medium through which Bengali thought, Bengali culture, and Bengali identity are constituted. To relegate Bengali to a secondary status in the educational system of Bangladesh, to prefer English as the language of higher education, of the professions, and of educated social interaction, is not simply a practical choice about which language happens to be more useful for career advancement. It is a choice that has profound consequences for the kind of knowledge that is produced and disseminated in Bangladesh, for who has access to that knowledge, for the social hierarchies that are reproduced through the educational system, and for the self-understanding of the Bengali people.

This argument draws on a tradition of thinking about language and power that extends from the Romantic nationalism of Herder and Fichte through the anticolonial linguistic politics of figures like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (the Kenyan writer who famously chose to write in Gikuyu rather than English) to the sociolinguistic analyses of Bourdieu and others who have shown how linguistic capital functions as a form of social capital that is unequally distributed and that reproduces existing social hierarchies. Khan is familiar with all of these traditions, and he draws on them selectively to construct his own distinctive argument.

His French pun, adapted for Bengali, that the quality of education will remain "medium" (middling, average) as long as Bengali is not the medium of education, is not just a clever wordplay. It captures a genuine insight: that the choice of language in education is not neutral,

that it has real consequences for the depth and quality of learning, for the ability of students to connect new knowledge to their existing knowledge and experience, and for the development of an intellectually vibrant national culture. Education conducted primarily in a language that is not the learner's mother tongue is necessarily more superficial, more rote, and less creative than education conducted in the mother tongue, because the learner is always doing the additional cognitive work of translation rather than fully engaging with the substance of what is being taught.

6.2 English and Colonial Cringe: The Psychology of Linguistic Self-Deprecation

Khan's analysis of the preference for English in Bangladeshi educated circles goes beyond the structural and pedagogical arguments about the relationship between language and learning. It also involves a psychological argument about what he calls "colonial cringe": the internalization by colonized subjects of the colonizer's assumption that the colonizer's language is superior, more rational, more capable of complex thought, more suitable for the expression of serious ideas.

This psychological argument draws directly on Fanon's analysis of the colonized consciousness, but it also draws on Lacan. In Lacanian terms, the choice of English over Bengali in educated Bangladeshi circles is an example of the colonized subject seeking to align himself with the position of the master, the position from which recognition and status flow. The colonial symbolic order, the set of signifiers through which value, prestige, and authority are distributed, is one in which English (as the language of the metropolitan center) occupies the privileged position and Bengali (as the language of the colonial periphery) occupies the subordinate one. To choose English is to position oneself closer to the symbolic master's place; to choose Bengali is to accept a subordinate position within the colonial symbolic order.

What makes this particularly insidious, from Khan's perspective, is that this choice reproduces colonial hierarchy even after the formal end of colonial rule. Postcolonial Bangladesh may be politically independent, but if its educated elite continues to valorize English over Bengali, to prefer English-medium education for their children, to conduct the serious business of government, law, and higher education in English, then the colonial symbolic order persists in the postcolonial period. Independence becomes, in Fanon's phrase, merely the replacement of the foreign colonizer by the native one.

Khan's critique of this situation is pointed in the direction not just of language policy but of what he identifies as the perversion at the heart of the Bangladeshi ruling class: their profession of Bengali nationalism while their practices betray a profound commitment to the English-language cultural order that marks them as a comprador elite rather than a genuine national ruling class. This critique of the ruling class as "perverts" (in the precise Lacanian sense: people whose acts and thoughts do not match their stated commitments) is one of the sharpest and most provocative dimensions of Khan's public intellectual practice.

6.3 The Bangla Academy and the Politics of Standardization

Khan has also been a vocal critic of the Bangla Academy, the national institution charged with the development and promotion of the Bengali language, its literature, and its culture. His criticisms are multiple: he has argued that the Academy has failed to produce adequate translations of important works of world literature and scholarship into Bengali, that its orthographic prescriptions are misguided and counterproductive, and that it has generally failed to perform its duty as a center for the production and dissemination of advanced knowledge in Bengali.

The question of orthography deserves a moment's attention, because it connects to broader questions about language standardization, linguistic authority, and the politics of cultural identity. The Bengali script has, over its long history, developed various forms of orthographic convention, and there are genuine debates among linguists and educators about the best way to standardize Bengali spelling. Khan's objections to Bangla Academy's prescriptions are both technical (he believes some of its rules are linguistically indefensible) and political (he sees the imposition of arbitrary orthographic standards as a form of cultural authoritarianism that stifles linguistic creativity and alienates ordinary speakers from their own language).

More broadly, Khan's critique of the Bangla Academy is part of his wider critique of what he sees as the bureaucratization of Bengali cultural life: the tendency to subordinate genuine intellectual and cultural vitality to the institutional interests of the state and of the educated elite that manages the state's cultural apparatus. Real linguistic and cultural development, in Khan's view, comes from the creativity of ordinary speakers and writers, not from the decrees of official academies.

6.4 Mother Tongue Education and International Debates

Khan's advocacy for mother tongue education in Bangladesh connects to a broader international debate about language policy in education that has been ongoing since at least the 1950s and that has taken on new urgency with the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and various international development agencies. The international research literature on this question is now quite extensive, and it strongly supports the position that children learn more effectively when they are educated in their mother tongue, especially in the early years of schooling.

The evidence for this position comes from multiple sources: from cognitive psychology (which shows that conceptual learning requires a solid foundation in an existing linguistic framework), from neuroscience (which shows that multilingual education puts additional cognitive demands on learners), from sociolinguistics (which shows that children who are educated in a language other than their mother tongue often develop surface fluency without deep comprehension), and from comparative education research (which shows that countries with strong mother-tongue-based education systems consistently perform better on measures of learning outcomes than those with colonial or second-language-dominant systems).

Khan's advocacy for mother tongue education is thus well supported by the international research literature, even as it conflicts with the preferences of the Bangladeshi educated elite who see English-medium education as a mark of social distinction and a ticket to economic opportunity.

The tension between the educational case for mother tongue instruction and the social and economic case for English-medium education is one of the central dilemmas of educational policy in postcolonial societies, and it has no easy resolution.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ISLAM, SECULARISM, AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGION IN BANGLADESH

7.1 The Complex Terrain of Religion and Politics in Bangladesh

Any serious engagement with Salimullah Khan's work must grapple with his analysis of Islam and its role in Bangladeshi politics and culture. This is perhaps the most sensitive and the most controversial dimension of his intellectual practice, because it cuts across multiple fault lines in contemporary Bangladeshi society: the fault line between secular nationalism and Islamic identity politics, the fault line between progressive and conservative interpretations of Islam, the fault line between Bengali cultural identity and the broader Islamic world, and the fault line between academic analysis and political intervention.

Khan's position on these questions is, characteristically, dialectical and resistant to simple categorization. He is not a secularist in the simple sense of someone who believes that religion should be strictly separated from public life and that politics should be conducted on purely secular terms. But he is deeply opposed to the use of religion as an instrument of political mobilization for communal or authoritarian ends, and he has been a consistent critic of Islamist political parties (particularly Jamaat-e-Islami) that he regards as collaborators in the genocide of 1971 and as opponents of the democratic and emancipatory values that he believes the Liberation War expressed.

Khan's engagement with Islam is rooted in his engagement with the Bengali Muslim tradition, a tradition that he sees as having its own distinctive character, shaped by centuries of interaction between Islamic values and Bengali cultural norms. He has written about the way in which Islam was spread in Bengal through the medium of the Bengali language, and he has argued that this linguistic medium of Islamization created a form of Bengali Islam that was, from the beginning, less rigidly Arabic in its orientation and more open to local cultural influences than some other Islamic traditions. Figures like Lalon Shah, whose songs transcended the boundaries of religious communities and whose philosophy of universal humanity resonated with elements of Sufi Islamic thought, represent for Khan the most valuable dimension of this Bengali Muslim tradition.

7.2 The Dawra Degree and Questions of Educational Integration

One of the most concrete manifestations of Khan's approach to the relationship between Islam and education was his support, in 2017, for the government of Bangladesh's decision to recognize the Dawra degree of the Qawmi madrasa system. The Qawmi madrasas are Islamic educational institutions that operate outside the state educational system, following a traditional curriculum based on classical Islamic texts (primarily the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum developed

in eighteenth-century India). They have been the primary locus of Islamic religious education for a significant portion of the Bangladeshi population, and their graduates have not previously had their qualifications recognized by the state educational system.

Khan's support for recognizing the Dawra degree was not uncritical: he did not argue that the Qawmi madrasa system is perfect or that its curriculum is adequate for the needs of a modern society. Rather, he argued that the recognition of the Dawra degree was an important step toward integrating the Qawmi community into the national mainstream, and that exclusion of this community from the formal recognition of the state had contributed to their marginalization and to the conditions in which extremist ideologies could flourish.

This position reflects Khan's broader analytical framework: he approaches the question of religious extremism not as a problem of inherently dangerous religious ideas but as a problem produced by specific social and political conditions, including the marginalization and exclusion of particular communities, the failure of the state to provide adequate education and economic opportunity, and the manipulation of religious sentiment by political entrepreneurs with specific interests. Addressing extremism requires, on this view, not just ideological counter-argument but social and political inclusion.

7.3 Communalism, Minorities, and the Rohingya Question

Khan's analysis of communalism extends beyond the Muslim-Hindu binary that is the most common frame for discussing religious conflict in South Asia. He has also engaged with the situation of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and with the question of Buddhist minorities in Bangladesh, and his analysis connects these situations to the broader framework of colonial history and postcolonial politics.

The Rohingya situation is particularly important for Khan's analysis, given his origins in Cox's Bazar, the district that has become home to the world's largest refugee camp as hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled violence in Myanmar. Khan locates the Rohingya crisis within the framework of colonial history: the current boundaries of Myanmar (Burma), like those of other colonial states in Southeast Asia, were drawn by colonial powers without regard for the ethnic and cultural communities that lived within the territories they encompassed, and the Rohingya, as a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority in a predominantly Buddhist state, have been made the victims of a nationalist politics that uses their religious and ethnic difference to scapegoat them for the failures and tensions of the Burmese national project.

The treatment of the Rohingya, from Khan's perspective, is an example of what happens when communalism and nationalism intersect in a context of economic stress and political crisis: a vulnerable minority becomes the object of violence as dominant groups seek to consolidate their identity and assert their control. His analysis of this situation draws on his broader framework for understanding communalism, but it also raises specific questions about the obligations of the Bangladeshi state toward refugees and about the international politics of the Rohingya crisis.

7.4 Islam, Modernity, and the Question of Interpretation

Khan's engagement with Islam is also philosophical, in the sense that he is interested in the question of how Islamic texts and traditions can be interpreted in ways that are compatible with the values of human dignity, equality, and social justice that he sees as foundational to both the Liberation War and to a genuinely progressive politics. This is a question that has been central to Islamic intellectual life for over a century, in the tradition of reformist and modernist interpretations of Islam associated with figures like Muhammad Abduh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Allama Iqbal, and, more recently, a diverse range of feminist, liberal, and progressive Muslim thinkers.

Khan does not position himself primarily as a theologian or as an Islamic scholar; his engagement with Islamic intellectual traditions is that of a culturally grounded intellectual who brings the tools of critical theory to bear on questions about interpretation, authority, and the politics of religious discourse. He is interested in how specific interpretations of Islamic texts have been used to legitimate specific political arrangements, how the authority of religious scholars has been constructed and maintained, and how alternative interpretations might open up different political possibilities.

His approach here draws on Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a "discursive tradition," an approach that understands Islam not as a fixed set of doctrines or practices but as an ongoing tradition of debate, interpretation, and argument about the proper forms of Muslim life and practice. This approach allows Khan to engage with Islamic intellectual traditions without either accepting them uncritically or dismissing them as incompatible with modernity.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE CRITIQUE OF WESTERN THOUGHT: ORIENTALISM, IMPERIALISM, AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

8.1 The Problem of Western Thought in a Postcolonial Context

Throughout this Part, we have seen how Khan engages with Western philosophical and theoretical traditions: Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Continental philosophy, legal positivism, natural law theory. But Khan is not simply a consumer of Western thought; he is also a critic of it, and his critique of Western thought is one of the most important dimensions of his intellectual project.

The central problem that Khan identifies in Western thought is not that it is simply wrong or that it has nothing to offer. He is too sophisticated a reader to make such a crude claim. The problem, rather, is that Western thought has systematically presented itself as universal, as the expression of reason as such, when in fact it is the expression of reason in a particular historical and social context, shaped by specific class interests, by the experience of colonial domination, and by the assumptions of a culture that has been in a position of global dominance for the past several centuries.

This critique of Western thought as falsely universal is, of course, not Khan's invention; it is a central motif of postcolonial theory from Said's *Orientalism* to Dipesh Chakrabarty's

Provincializing Europe. But Khan's version of this critique has its own distinctive character, shaped by his specific intellectual formation and his specific political commitments.

8.2 Said and Orientalism: Knowledge as Power

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, as we have already noted, describes the way in which Western scholarly and literary representations of the "Orient" function not just as descriptions of a pre-existing reality but as constitutive of that reality in ways that serve the interests of colonial power. The "Orient" that emerges from Orientalist discourse is passive, traditional, irrational, sensual, and in need of Western guidance and governance. This representation justifies colonial intervention by constructing the colonized as incapable of self-governance.

Khan applies this analysis to the representations of Bangladesh and of Bangladesh in Western academic and journalistic discourse. He is attentive to the ways in which Bangladesh is typically represented in Western media: as a site of natural disaster, of poverty, of population pressure, of political dysfunction, and of Islamic extremism. This representation, like the Orientalist discourse Said analyzes, constructs Bangladesh as a problem that requires external management rather than as a society with its own intellectual traditions, its own political achievements, and its own capacity for self-determination.

But Khan's engagement with Said is also critical. He sees in Said's Orientalism a tendency toward a certain idealism: a focus on discourse and representation at the expense of material conditions. The problem with colonial rule was not just that it produced bad representations of colonized peoples; it was that it extracted surplus value, destroyed existing social structures, and produced the material poverty and political fragility that make postcolonial societies vulnerable. Discourse criticism is not sufficient; it must be connected to material analysis.

8.3 The Post-War International Order: Imperialism in New Forms

Khan's critique of Western power extends beyond the analysis of discourse to the analysis of the concrete political and economic arrangements of the post-World War Two international order. He is a critic of what he sees as the imperialist dimensions of this order: the ways in which nominally universal institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization have served the interests of the dominant Western powers at the expense of the developing world, the ways in which "development" discourse has been used to justify continued Western intervention in the internal affairs of postcolonial states, and the ways in which military power has been used to enforce the interests of global capital under the guise of democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention.

His analysis of the post-9/11 "War on Terror" is a good example of this critique in practice. Khan situates the American military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the broader global security architecture that emerged after September 2001, within the tradition of Western imperial interventionism that he has been analyzing throughout his career. He is not sympathetic to the political projects of the Taliban or of other jihadist organizations; his critique of Western imperialism does not lead him to romanticize the forces that resist it by violence. But he insists on understanding the conditions, including the long history of Western intervention in the

Muslim world, the specific grievances generated by that intervention, and the class dynamics of recruitment to extremist organizations, that give rise to jihadist politics, rather than treating it as the irrational expression of a dangerous religion.

8.4 India, Bangladesh, and the Regional Dimension of Power

Khan's analysis of imperialism and Western power is not limited to the relationship between Bangladesh and the distant West. He is also attentive to the regional dimension of power, and in particular to the relationship between Bangladesh and India, its much larger neighbor. His comments on India-Bangladesh relations have been among his most controversial public interventions, particularly in the context of the post-2024 political situation in Bangladesh.

Khan has argued, drawing on his broader framework of anti-imperial analysis, that India's relationship to Bangladesh is not simply that of a friendly neighbor and historical ally (having provided crucial military support during the Liberation War of 1971) but also contains elements of regional hegemony that need to be critically analyzed. He has pointed to what he sees as Indian support for the Hasina government despite its democratic deficits, to the cultural and economic asymmetries between the two countries, and to the ways in which the "big brother" dynamic of the India-Bangladesh relationship replicates at the regional level some of the asymmetries of the global North-South relationship.

This analysis was given new urgency by the events of July and August 2024, when the student-led uprising that eventually forced Sheikh Hasina to flee Bangladesh created a new political situation in which the relationship between Bangladesh and India became a matter of intense public debate. Khan's interventions in this debate, in which he was sharply critical of what he characterized as Indian attempts to characterize Bangladesh as unstable and in need of oversight, connected his longstanding intellectual analysis to the most urgent political questions of the moment.

CHAPTER NINE: CULTURAL CRITICISM: FROM BAUDELAIRE TO BOLLYWOOD

9.1 The Cultural Critic's Practice

Alongside his political analysis and his theoretical work, Khan is a cultural critic of wide-ranging interests and considerable sophistication. His cultural criticism spans the full range from high literary culture (Baudelaire, Benjamin, Tagore, Nazrul) to popular culture (film, music, television talk shows), and it is animated throughout by the same set of theoretical commitments that inform his political and philosophical work.

Khan's cultural criticism operates on the assumption, drawn from the Marxist and psychoanalytic traditions, that culture is not a separate, autonomous realm floating above the material and political dimensions of social life but is deeply entangled with them. Cultural products, whether poems, films, songs, or architectural forms, are shaped by the material conditions in which they are produced, but they also actively produce and reproduce social meanings, desires, and

identifications that are not simply reflections of those conditions. Understanding culture requires attending to both its material conditions and its symbolic work, and this double attention is characteristic of Khan's critical practice.

9.2 Charles Baudelaire and the Critique of Modernity

Baudelaire is one of the thinkers and poets on whom Khan has written most extensively, and the engagement is instructive about the range and character of his cultural criticism. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), the French poet and critic, is most famous for his collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil), which is widely regarded as one of the founding texts of literary modernism. But Baudelaire is also the author of important critical essays, including his famous analysis of the figure of the "flâneur" (the urban stroller who observes the spectacle of the modern city with a combination of fascination and detachment), which Walter Benjamin made the center of his monumental, unfinished study of Paris in the nineteenth century, the *Passagenwerk* (Arcades Project).

Khan's engagement with Baudelaire is mediated primarily through Benjamin, and it connects to his broader interest in the cultural politics of modernity. Baudelaire, for Benjamin, was the poet who expressed most acutely the contradictory experience of modern urban life: the excitement and the alienation, the sensory richness and the social poverty, the endless novelty and the underlying monotony, of life in the capitalist city. For Khan, this reading of Baudelaire provides a model for thinking about the experience of modernity in Bangladesh: how the rapid urbanization and commercialization of Bangladeshi society over the past several decades has transformed social experience in ways that are at once exhilarating and disorienting.

9.3 Kazi Nazrul Islam and Anti-Colonial Democratic Thought

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is the National Poet of Bangladesh, a figure whose poetry, music, and political writing exercised an enormous influence on Bengali cultural and political life in the early twentieth century. Nazrul is perhaps best known for his rebellious, passionate poetry of political protest, his songs (Nazrul Sangeet) which are still widely sung across Bengal, and his explicit rejection of the hierarchies of caste, religion, and gender that structured colonial Bengali society.

Khan's reading of Nazrul emphasizes his anti-colonial and democratic dimensions in ways that distinguish it from more conventional nationalist treatments of the poet. For Khan, Nazrul is not primarily a Bengali nationalist or a Muslim poet (though he was both) but a thinker who articulated a vision of popular emancipation that drew on multiple traditions, Islamic, Hindu, Western, and Bengali, to create a cultural politics of radical inclusivity. Nazrul's famous poem "Bidrohi" (The Rebel), with its assertion of total freedom and its rejection of all authority, is for Khan an expression of the spirit of popular resistance that he sees as one of the most valuable elements of Bengali cultural tradition.

Khan's engagement with Nazrul also connects to his advocacy for Bengali as the medium of education. Nazrul wrote primarily in Bengali, for a mass popular audience, and his success demonstrates, for Khan, both the expressive richness of the Bengali language and the possibility

of reaching a genuinely popular audience through Bengali rather than English. The contrast with the *bhadralok* tradition, which tended to privilege English or a highly Sanskritized Bengali that was inaccessible to ordinary people, is for Khan a political as much as a literary contrast.

9.4 Ahmed Sofa: The Mentor, the Critic, and the Model

Ahmed Sofa (1943-2001) is the Bangladeshi thinker on whom Khan has written most extensively, and the relationship between the two men is, as we have noted, one of the most important formative influences on Khan's intellectual development. Khan's book *Ahmed Sofa Shanjibani* (The Life-Force of Ahmed Sofa, 2010) established him as the leading expert on Sofa's work and thought, and he has returned to Sofa repeatedly in his subsequent writing.

What is it about Sofa that Khan finds so compelling? Several things, it seems. First, Sofa's intellectual range and seriousness: Sofa was one of the most widely read and deeply reflective Bangladeshi intellectuals of his generation, with a command of Bengali literary tradition, Islamic philosophy, Western thought (particularly Marx, Freud, and existentialism), and the global currents of anti-colonial and postcolonial thinking. Second, Sofa's uncompromising critical stance: he was unwilling to make the easy compromises with power and convention that characterized most Bangladeshi intellectuals of his era, and his criticism of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia's mediocrity, cowardice, and servility was as sharp and unsparing as it was well-founded. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Sofa's combination of Bengali rootedness and global intellectual formation: he was as deeply immersed in Bengali literary and cultural tradition as anyone of his generation, but he brought to that tradition the critical tools of Western thought, deployed not in a spirit of cultural mimicry but in a spirit of creative synthesis.

Khan's relationship with Sofa was not simply one of admiration and discipleship. As we have already noted, Sofa was critical of Khan's first book, and the intellectual tension between them was productive throughout their relationship. Khan has written about this tension with great sensitivity, showing how the creative friction between mentor and student can be a source of intellectual growth for both parties.

9.5 Lalon Shah and the Tradition of Baul Philosophy

Lalon Shah (c. 1774-1890) is one of the most remarkable figures in the history of Bengali cultural life. A mystic, philosopher, and folk musician whose songs (known as Baul songs) have been sung throughout Bengal for over a century, Lalon remains a living presence in Bangladeshi and West Bengali cultural life. His songs express a philosophy of radical egalitarianism and spiritual universalism that rejects the boundaries of caste, religion, and social convention in favor of a direct engagement with the divine within the human.

Khan's engagement with Lalon connects to several of his major intellectual interests. Lalon's rejection of religious boundaries (he has been claimed by both Hindu and Muslim communities, and in fact resisted both claims) exemplifies the syncretic, non-communal dimension of Bengali culture that Khan sees as one of its most valuable features. Lalon's use of Bengali language and folk music forms demonstrates the richness and depth of Bengali vernacular culture. And Lalon's philosophy, with its emphasis on the human body as the site of the divine and its critique of

orthodox religious practices, connects to the Freudian and Lacanian interest in the body as a site of desire, drive, and subjective formation.

Khan has written about Lalon's "sadhana" (spiritual practice) in terms that bring together the Bengali mystical tradition with psychoanalytic concepts: the practice of subtraction from conventional identity ("ami-r biyog," the subtraction of the "I"), the cultivation of a kind of ego dissolution that Lacan would describe as a relation to the Real beyond the imaginary, the insistence that the divine is found not in external rituals or institutions but in the depths of the human person. This is not a conventional reading of Lalon, and it is not uncontroversial; some readers find it a productive synthesis, others find it an imposition of alien categories on a tradition that has its own integrity. Khan would likely respond that all interpretation is necessarily a translation between frameworks, and that the question is whether the translation illuminates or distorts.

CHAPTER TEN: POLITICAL ANALYSIS: THE STATE, DEMOCRACY, AND THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

10.1 Gramsci, Hegemony, and the Role of Intellectuals

Khan's analysis of the role of intellectuals in society draws significantly on Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the Italian Marxist philosopher and political strategist who developed the concept of hegemony and who wrote extensively about the relationship between intellectuals and politics. Gramsci's concept of "organic intellectuals," intellectuals who emerge from and remain organically connected to a particular social class and who perform the function of giving that class's interests coherent expression and legitimacy, is one that Khan has applied to the analysis of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia.

The Bangladeshi intelligentsia, in Khan's analysis, is primarily composed of "traditional intellectuals" in Gramsci's sense: people who present themselves as independent, disinterested servants of truth and culture, but who in practice serve the interests of the dominant classes by legitimating the existing social order and by ensuring that the cultural and ideological dimensions of class domination are maintained. The Bengali intellectual tradition of the *bhadralok* has, from Khan's perspective, historically served this function: presenting the interests of the educated upper-class Bengali as the interests of Bengal as a whole, and marginalizing the interests and the voices of the peasantry, the working class, and the urban poor.

Khan positions himself, and has been positioned by his admirers, as a different kind of intellectual: one who consciously aligns himself with the interests of the oppressed majority rather than with the ruling class, and who uses his theoretical training to expose and criticize the mechanisms of hegemony rather than to reproduce them. Whether this self-positioning is fully justified is a question that his critics have raised, and it deserves serious attention.

10.2 The July 2024 Uprising and Khan's Political Intervention

The events of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, when a mass uprising led by students against the quota system for government jobs rapidly expanded into a broader challenge to the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, and eventually forced Hasina's resignation and flight from the country, represented one of the most dramatic political moments in Bangladeshi history since 1971. Khan was directly involved in these events in a way that is revealing of his understanding of the role of the public intellectual.

On July 31, 2024, Khan delivered a speech at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), where he was still teaching at the time, calling publicly for Prime Minister Hasina's resignation. This was a dramatic intervention: Khan was putting himself directly at risk (the Hasina government had been systematically persecuting critics and dissidents) and publicly committing himself to the cause of the uprising. When asked subsequently what had led him to make this decision, he returned to Fanon: "there comes a time when silence becomes dishonesty."

This intervention was significant for several reasons. It demonstrated the connection between Khan's theoretical work and his political practice: the Fanonian framework that he had been applying analytically to Bangladeshi political life for decades provided the conceptual resources for his political decision. It demonstrated the willingness of a senior intellectual figure to take personal risks in support of a popular movement, which is not always the case. And it positioned Khan within the complex political landscape of post-uprising Bangladesh, where the relationship between the intellectual left, the student movement, and the various political formations competing for power after Hasina's fall has been a matter of ongoing negotiation.

In his reflections on these events, published in *The Daily Star* in August 2025, Khan deployed the full range of his theoretical resources: Sartre's "bad faith" to analyze the inauthenticity of the previous political order, Partha Chatterjee's concept of "Macaulay's poison tree" to analyze the educational system's role in producing a comprador elite, and his own longstanding framework of Lacanian-Marxist analysis to understand the psychic and social dynamics of the uprising.

10.3 The Constitution, Democracy, and the Spirit of the Liberation War

Khan's constitutional analysis, as we have noted, includes the argument that the 1972 constitution failed to incorporate the spirit of the Liberation War. This argument has become more relevant and more contested in the context of the post-2024 political situation, when the question of what kind of political order Bangladesh should have is being actively debated.

Khan's position on constitutional questions is not simply that the 1972 constitution was flawed and needs to be replaced with a better one. His analysis is more nuanced: he is interested in the relationship between the formal constitutional text and the substantive political culture and social relations that the constitution is supposed to regulate and express. A constitution that genuinely expressed the spirit of the Liberation War, in Khan's view, would need to go beyond formal guarantees of rights to address the actual social and economic conditions under which those rights can be meaningfully exercised.

This involves engaging with the debate between formal and substantive conceptions of democracy. Formal democracy holds that democracy is a matter of procedures: regular elections, constitutional limits on government power, protection of basic rights, rule of law. Substantive democracy holds that these formal procedures are necessary but not sufficient for genuine self-governance: real democracy requires also that all citizens have the material means to participate effectively in political life, that extreme economic inequality does not translate into extreme political inequality, and that the cultural conditions for genuine public deliberation are present.

Khan is a committed advocate of substantive democracy in this sense, and his critique of Bangladeshi political life since independence is largely a critique of the gap between formal democracy and substantive democracy. Bangladesh has had elections (of varying degrees of fairness), constitutional guarantees of rights, and other formal democratic institutions. But it has not achieved the social and economic conditions under which all citizens can genuinely participate as equals in political life, and this gap has been the source of the recurring crises that have marked its post-independence history.

10.4 Intellectuals, Coercion, and Consent

Khan's engagement with Gramsci's framework for analyzing the relationship between intellectuals, civil society, and the state provides him with a way of understanding one of the recurring dilemmas of public intellectual life: the relationship between intellectual activity and political power. Gramsci distinguished between the political society, the set of institutions through which the state exercises coercive power (police, courts, prisons, military), and civil society, the set of institutions through which hegemony is maintained through consent rather than coercion (universities, newspapers, religious institutions, voluntary associations). He argued that intellectuals play a key role in civil society, performing the function of producing and disseminating the ideological frameworks through which the hegemony of the dominant class is maintained.

This framework raises a difficult question for anyone, like Khan, who aspires to be a critical intellectual: how is it possible to participate in the institutions of civil society (universities, newspapers, television shows) without simply reproducing the hegemonic functions that those institutions typically serve? How can one use the resources that the existing social order provides for intellectual work (university salaries, publishing contracts, media platforms) without being co-opted by that order?

Khan's response to this dilemma is not a simple one. He does not adopt the position of the "unattached intellectual" who claims to stand outside all social commitments and to serve only the truth. He is explicit about his political commitments and his social alliances. But he is also aware of the ways in which intellectual work can be compromised by institutional pressures, by the desire for recognition from powerful patrons, and by the temptation to mistake verbal radicalism for genuine political engagement. His critique of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia is, in part, a critique of the gap between the radical posturing that has been common in Bangladeshi intellectual circles and the actual political practice of those intellectuals.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: PSYCHOANALYTIC CULTURAL THEORY AND ITS APPLICATIONS

11.1 Applying Psychoanalysis to Social and Political Life

One of the most distinctive and most controversial dimensions of Khan's intellectual practice is his use of psychoanalytic concepts not just in the analysis of individual psychology but in the analysis of social, political, and cultural phenomena. This practice has a long history in the Western intellectual tradition, from Freud's own cultural essays (Totem and Taboo, Civilization and Its Discontents, Moses and Monotheism) through the Frankfurt School's analysis of the "authoritarian personality" and the "culture industry" to the Lacanian analysis of ideology, desire, and the social bond. But it remains controversial, with critics arguing that psychoanalytic concepts developed in the clinical setting cannot be straightforwardly applied to social phenomena, and that doing so risks psychologizing what are really social and structural problems.

Khan is aware of these criticisms and he does not simply dismiss them. His use of psychoanalytic concepts in social analysis is more analogical than strictly clinical: he uses these concepts as heuristic tools that illuminate certain dimensions of social phenomena, rather than claiming that social groups are literally analyzable in the same way as individual patients on the analyst's couch. This analogical use of psychoanalytic concepts is, he would argue, no different from the analogical use of any theoretical concept: all theoretical application involves some degree of idealization and simplification, and the test is whether the application illuminates or distorts.

11.2 National Identity and the Imaginary

Lacan's concept of the Imaginary, the register of experience organized around images, identifications, and the specular relation (the relation to one's own reflection), provides Khan with a powerful tool for analyzing how national identity works. National identity is, in important ways, an imaginary formation: it is constituted around a shared image of the nation (as a people with a common history, a common culture, a common destiny) that serves to unify individuals who are in reality divided by class, religion, gender, and other axes of difference.

The imaginary dimension of national identity is both its strength and its weakness. Its strength lies in its capacity to create a sense of solidarity and shared purpose that can motivate collective action, including revolutionary action. The imaginary identification with the nation was a powerful force in the Liberation War of 1971, enabling people from very different social backgrounds to act together against a common enemy. Its weakness lies in its vulnerability to disillusionment (when the nation turns out to be divided by interests rather than unified by identity) and to manipulation (by political entrepreneurs who exploit national feeling for their own ends).

Khan's analysis of the post-independence disillusionment with Bangladeshi nationalism draws on this Lacanian framework. The expectations generated by the imaginary identification with the nation in 1971 were extremely high: the liberation of Bangladesh was expected to bring not just

political independence but genuine social transformation, the creation of a new kind of society in which the values of equality, dignity, and justice that had animated the liberation movement would be institutionalized. When the reality of post-independence Bangladesh fell dramatically short of these expectations (with the rapid deterioration of political stability, the emergence of corruption and authoritarianism under the Mujib government, the military coup of 1975, and the subsequent decades of political instability), the disillusionment was correspondingly severe.

11.3 Joissance, Drive, and Political Extremism

Lacan's concept of *jouissance* (a term that is variously translated as "enjoyment," "bliss," or left untranslated, and that refers to a form of excessive satisfaction associated with the drive rather than with desire) provides Khan with a framework for analyzing the appeal of political extremism. Extremist ideologies, whether religious or secular, offer their adherents something that ordinary politics cannot provide: a sense of complete identification with a cause, a release from the anxiety of ordinary subjective dividedness, a form of intense, all-encompassing belonging that Lacan would characterize as *jouissance* rather than mere pleasure.

The appeal of jihadist ideology, for example, is not well captured by rational-actor models that see it as simply a strategic choice made by people who calculate that violent resistance will advance their political goals. It has a more psychic dimension: the offer of a form of total identification and total commitment that dissolves the uncertainties and anxieties of ordinary selfhood. Understanding this psychic dimension is essential for developing effective responses to extremism, because purely rational or material responses (improving economic opportunities, reforming political institutions) do not address the psychic needs that extremist movements serve.

Khan's analysis of political extremism in Bangladesh draws on this framework. He has argued, consistently and controversially, that the appeal of religious extremism in Bangladesh (including the appeal of various radical Islamist groups that have been active in the country) is best understood not as the expression of some inherent tendency toward violence in Islamic thought but as a response to specific social and psychological conditions: the breakdown of traditional social structures, the failure of the state to provide education and economic opportunity, the anxiety produced by rapid social change, and the absence of other forms of collective identity and solidarity that might channel the energies that extremist movements appropriate.

11.4 The Pervert Structure and the Bangladeshi Ruling Class

Perhaps the most provocative application of Lacanian concepts in Khan's cultural and political analysis is his characterization of the Bangladeshi ruling class (or significant portions of it) as exhibiting what Lacan describes as the "pervert structure." This requires careful explanation, because the Lacanian concept of perversion has little to do with the colloquial sense of the term.

For Lacan, the pervert is someone whose relation to the symbolic order is characterized by a specific form of disavowal: knowing perfectly well that a certain law or norm exists, but refusing to recognize its binding force in practice. The classic Freudian example is the fetishist, who knows (at some level) that women do not have penises but nonetheless organizes his desire

around a fetish object that functions as a substitute for the imagined phallus, thereby allowing him to disavow the knowledge that would, if fully accepted, generate castration anxiety. More broadly, the pervert is someone who maintains a split between knowledge and belief: they know one thing but act as if they believed another.

Khan applies this structure to the Bangladeshi ruling class in the specific context of language politics. The ruling class of Bangladesh professes a commitment to Bengali as the national language and the proper medium of Bangladeshi cultural and political life. This is their stated knowledge and their public identity as Bengali nationalists. But their actual practices betray this profession: they send their children to English-medium schools, they prefer English in the workplace, they organize their social life around English-language cultural products, and they design the educational and administrative systems in ways that give systematic advantages to English-speakers.

This gap between stated commitment (to Bengali) and actual practice (preferring English) is, in Khan's analysis, a form of the pervert structure: not lying in the simple sense (these people may sincerely believe in their Bengali nationalist commitments at some level) but maintaining a fundamental disavowal, a splitting of knowledge from belief that allows them to be Bengali nationalists in theory and anglophile compradors in practice. The political consequences of this split are significant: it means that the ruling class cannot be trusted to carry out the decolonization of Bangladeshi culture and education, because their actual commitments run in the opposite direction from their stated ones.

CHAPTER TWELVE: SYNTHESIS AND ONGOING SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 The Coherence of the System

Having traced the major dimensions of Khan's thought through eleven chapters, we are now in a position to attempt a synthesis: to identify the underlying coherence of what might otherwise seem like a disparate collection of intellectual engagements spanning law, economics, psychoanalysis, cultural theory, political analysis, and the history of ideas.

The key to understanding the coherence of Khan's intellectual project lies in recognizing that all of its dimensions serve a single overarching purpose: the critique of the forms of domination, both material and symbolic, that prevent the people of Bangladesh (and, by extension, people in other postcolonial societies) from achieving the genuine self-determination that the best currents of their own political traditions have promised.

This overarching purpose takes specific form in Khan's commitment to three principles that he identifies as foundational to the Liberation War: equality, human dignity, and social justice. These are not just rhetorical commitments; they are analytical touchstones against which Khan measures every aspect of Bangladeshi political, cultural, and intellectual life, and consistently finds it wanting. The gap between the promise of 1971 and the reality of post-independence

Bangladesh is the wound that all of Khan's analytical work probes: not to cause pain for its own sake, but to understand what kind of medicine is needed and where it must be applied.

The various theoretical frameworks that Khan deploys, Marxist political economy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Fanonian postcolonial theory, Gramscian cultural analysis, Foucauldian genealogy, are not competing alternatives but complementary instruments, each suited to illuminating a different dimension of the complex social reality he is analyzing. Marxist political economy illuminates the material conditions and class relations that shape Bangladeshi society. Lacanian psychoanalysis illuminates the psychic structures through which those material conditions are experienced, internalized, and reproduced at the level of individual subjectivity and social fantasy. Fanonian theory illuminates the specific psychic and political dynamics of the colonial and postcolonial situation. Gramscian analysis illuminates the mechanisms through which hegemony is maintained and the potential roles of intellectuals in either maintaining or challenging it. Foucauldian genealogy provides tools for historicizing apparently natural or given social arrangements and showing the contingent power relations that produced them.

12.2 The Question of Intellectual Coherence and Its Critics

Khan's synthesis is ambitious, and it has attracted critics from multiple directions. Economists may object that his use of economic categories is too loose and insufficiently rigorous. Psychoanalysts may object that his application of clinical concepts to social phenomena violates the methodological constraints of psychoanalytic practice. Philosophers may object that the synthesis of Marx and Lacan involves unresolved tensions that cannot be wished away. Political scientists may object that his analysis of Bangladeshi politics is too heavily influenced by his political commitments to constitute rigorous analysis.

These objections deserve to be taken seriously rather than simply dismissed. The value of Khan's work does not rest on the claim that it is philosophically or methodologically impeccable by the standards of any single academic discipline. It rests, rather, on two more practical claims: that it asks the right questions (about the conditions of human dignity, equality, and justice in a postcolonial society), and that the answers it offers, however imperfect, illuminate aspects of Bangladeshi social reality that would otherwise remain invisible or misunderstood.

The test of critical theory, as Horkheimer argued in his programmatic essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937), is not whether it corresponds to the methodological norms of existing academic disciplines (which are themselves products of the social division of labor in bourgeois society) but whether it serves the emancipatory interests of the oppressed and marginalized. By this pragmatic test, Khan's work has considerable merit: it has given Bangladeshi readers analytical tools for understanding their own situation, it has created space for critical thinking about power, culture, and history in a society where such thinking is often suppressed, and it has modeled a form of intellectual life in which the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of justice are not separate but are deeply entangled.

12.3 Recent Developments: 2024-2026

The years 2024-2026 have been a period of dramatic political change in Bangladesh, and Khan has been actively engaged in interpreting and responding to these changes. The July 2024 uprising and the fall of the Hasina government opened a new phase in Bangladeshi political life, with all its possibilities and dangers. The subsequent debates about constitutional reform, about the proper relationship between the interim government and the political parties, about the role of the military, and about the direction of economic policy have been debates in which Khan has participated actively.

His move to North South University in 2025, his keynote address at a seminar on the July uprising in August 2025 (at Jahangirnagar University, in collaboration with NSU's Department of History and Philosophy), his participation in discussions about the legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam in the context of the post-uprising moment, his continued commentary on education, language policy, and the relationship with India: all of these activities demonstrate that at sixty-seven years old, Khan remains one of the most active and intellectually productive figures in Bangladeshi public life.

The Bangla Academy Literary Award that he received in February 2025, amid controversy about the award process and about the treatment of recipients, is a reminder that Khan's relationship to official recognition has always been complicated. He is too significant a figure to be ignored by official cultural institutions, but his uncompromising critical stance makes him a difficult figure for those institutions to accommodate. The controversy surrounding the award ceremony, in which Khan publicly stated that recipients were "humiliated," is characteristic of his refusal to simply accept institutional recognition on terms that require him to soften or compromise his critical positions.

12.4 The Pedagogy of Critical Thinking: Teaching Freud and Lacan in Bangladesh

One dimension of Khan's career that has not yet received adequate attention is his role as a teacher. Throughout his career, and most explicitly in his years at ULAB and now at North South University, Khan has been engaged in the project of teaching Freud and Lacan to Bangladeshi students, of introducing the tradition of psychoanalytic thought into a cultural context where it is not indigenous and where its assumptions are not taken for granted.

This pedagogical project is itself a form of intellectual politics. To teach Freud and Lacan to Bangladeshi students is not simply to transmit a body of knowledge; it is to suggest that the questions those thinkers asked about desire, language, and the formation of the subject are questions that are relevant to understanding Bengali culture and Bangladeshi politics. It is to refuse the assumption that European intellectual traditions are only relevant to European contexts. And it is to challenge students to think about their own experience and their own social world in ways that go beyond the conventional frameworks of Bangladeshi educational culture.

The reception of this pedagogical project has been, by all accounts, intense. Khan has acquired a reputation as one of the most demanding and most intellectually stimulating teachers in Bangladesh, someone whose classes attract students from far beyond his own institutional home and who has shaped the intellectual formation of a generation of Bangladeshi writers, academics, and public figures. The young thinkers who have gathered around him have absorbed not just

specific theoretical frameworks but a set of intellectual habits: the habit of close reading, the habit of historical contextualizing, the habit of seeking the hidden assumptions beneath the surface of apparently obvious claims, and the habit of connecting local particulars to global theoretical frameworks.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: THE GROUNDS FOR A CONTINUING ENCOUNTER

This first Part of our ten-part study has attempted to lay the foundations for a comprehensive understanding of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We have traced the biographical arc of his life, from his birth in Cox's Bazar through his legal education in Dhaka, his doctoral formation at The New School in New York, and his subsequent career as a teacher, writer, and public intellectual in Bangladesh. We have introduced the major theoretical frameworks through which he works: the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, the Freudian foundations, the engagement with Continental philosophy, the postcolonial theory of Fanon and Said, the legal philosophy that informs his analysis of law and the state. We have situated his work within the specific historical context of Bengali history, the colonial transformation of Bengal, the Partition of 1947, the Language Movement of 1952, the Liberation War of 1971, and the turbulent decades of post-independence Bangladeshi political life.

We have also begun to identify some of the tensions and difficulties in Khan's work: the tension between the universalist aspirations of his theoretical frameworks and the specific local context in which he deploys them, the tension between the demand for analytical rigor and the demand for political engagement, the tension between the critical intellectual's aspiration to speak for the oppressed and the institutional embeddedness that any intellectual necessarily has, the tension between the complexity of his theoretical vocabulary and the need to communicate with a broad popular audience.

These tensions are not defects to be corrected; they are productive contradictions that generate the energy of Khan's thought. They are also, in many ways, the tensions that characterize critical intellectual work in any postcolonial context, and understanding them is essential to understanding not just Khan's particular project but the broader project of postcolonial critical thought.

The remaining nine Parts of this textbook will build on the foundations laid here. Part Two will undertake a detailed analysis of Khan's Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, examining the philosophical arguments in depth and assessing their coherence and their productivity as analytical tools. Part Three will turn to his political economy, examining his doctoral research on central banking in the context of his broader analysis of capitalism, colonialism, and the political economy of Bangladesh. Part Four will focus on his legal philosophy, examining his analysis of the colonial legal legacy and his vision of what a genuinely postcolonial legal order would look like. Part Five will examine his analysis of the Liberation War and its aftermath. Part Six will focus on his engagement with language, education, and cultural politics. Part Seven will examine his analysis of religion, secularism, and communalism. Part Eight will turn to his cultural criticism, examining in detail his engagements with specific writers, artists, and cultural figures. Part Nine

will analyze his political interventions, including his response to the July 2024 uprising and his ongoing engagement with questions of democracy and constitutional reform. And Part Ten will offer a comprehensive assessment of his contribution to Bangladeshi and global intellectual life, situating him within the broader tradition of postcolonial critical thought and assessing the continuing significance of his work for the political and cultural questions that Bangladesh and the world face today.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES FOR PART ONE

Key Concepts and Terms

Lacanian-Marxist synthesis: The combination of Jacques Lacan's structural psychoanalysis with Karl Marx's historical materialism, producing an analytical framework that attends simultaneously to material conditions and to the psychic structures they produce and are produced by.

The Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary (RSI): Lacan's three registers of experience. The Imaginary is the dimension of images and identifications. The Symbolic is the dimension of language, law, and the social order. The Real is that which resists symbolization, associated with trauma and jouissance.

Hegemony: Gramsci's concept of the way in which dominant classes maintain their power not just through coercion but through the cultivation of consent, through the production of a common sense that makes existing social arrangements seem natural and inevitable.

Postcolonial theory: A body of intellectual work, associated with figures like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, that analyzes the cultural, psychological, and political dimensions of colonialism and its aftermath.

Orientalism: Said's term for the Western discourse that constructs the "Orient" as an object of knowledge available for Western contemplation and control, serving the interests of colonial power.

Objet petit a: Lacan's term for the object-cause of desire, the object that appears to promise satisfaction but whose function is to sustain desire rather than satisfy it.

Jouissance: Lacan's term for a form of excessive satisfaction associated with the drive rather than with desire, often experienced as painful or disturbing rather than simply pleasurable.

The Pervert Structure: In Lacanian theory, the psychic organization characterized by disavowal: knowing one thing but acting as if one believed another, maintaining a split between knowledge and practice.

Organic intellectuals: Gramsci's term for intellectuals who emerge from and remain connected to a particular social class, performing the function of giving that class's interests coherent expression and legitimacy.

Behat Biplab: Literally "the derailed revolution," Khan's concept for the Liberation War of 1971, understood as a revolutionary moment whose transformative potential was not fully realized.

Annotated Bibliography for Part One

Readers wishing to engage more deeply with the intellectual traditions discussed in this Part should begin with the following works. The list is selective and introductory; more detailed bibliographies will be provided in subsequent Parts.

On Marxism and Political Economy: For classical Marxist theory, start with the first volume of *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*. For Western Marxism, the most important texts include Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, the essays of the Frankfurt School (available in collections edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt), and Althusser's *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. For heterodox and feminist Marxism, Duncan K. Foley's *Understanding Capital* and the works of David Harvey are indispensable.

On Lacan and Freud: The primary texts are Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and Lacan's *Ecrits* and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. For accessible secondary literature, begin with Dylan Evans's *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* and Darian Leader's *What is Madness?*

On Postcolonial Theory: Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* are the foundational texts. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* are indispensable. For more recent postcolonial theory, see Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*.

On Bengali History: Tapan Raychaudhuri's *Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir*, Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, and Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India 1885-1947* provide important historical context. For the Liberation War, see Srinath Raghavan's *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* and Gary Bass's *The Blood Telegram*.

On Khan's Own Work: The most accessible entry points into Khan's writing in English are the essays published in *New Age* and *The Daily Star*, which can be accessed through their online archives. His major books are in Bengali, but several have been discussed in English-language academic work on Bangladeshi intellectual history.

Discussion Questions for Part One

1. Khan argues that the three foundational principles of the Liberation War of 1971 are equality, human dignity, and social justice. Do you agree that these are the appropriate foundational values for Bangladeshi national identity? What are the implications of making these values foundational for questions of law, economics, and cultural policy?
2. Khan's Lacanian-Marxist synthesis brings together two intellectual traditions that were developed in very different contexts (Western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and applies them to the analysis of Bangladeshi society. What are the strengths and limitations of this kind of theoretical transplantation? How do you assess the risks of misapplication against the potential insights?
3. Khan argues that the Bengali ruling class exhibits the "pervert structure" in their relationship to language: professing commitment to Bengali while practicing a preference for English. Is this diagnosis convincing? What are its implications for language policy? How does it compare to similar situations in other postcolonial societies?
4. Khan situates his analysis of communalism within a historical framework that traces its origins to British colonial policies. Is this historical approach adequate? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a historical versus a cultural or psychological approach to understanding communal violence?
5. The concept of "jouissance" is used by Khan to analyze the appeal of political extremism. Do you find this psychoanalytic framework illuminating or misleading when applied to social and political phenomena? What are the methodological risks of applying clinical psychoanalytic concepts to collective social behavior?
6. Khan's support for the Shahbagh Movement in 2013 and his public call for Hasina's resignation in 2024 represent two moments of direct political engagement by a public intellectual. What are the risks and responsibilities of intellectual engagement in politics? How should intellectuals navigate the tension between analytical objectivity and political commitment?
7. Compare Khan's advocacy for Bengali-medium education with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's advocacy for writing in Gikuyu in Kenya. What are the similarities and differences between these two situations? What does this comparison illuminate about the relationship between language, colonialism, and intellectual life in postcolonial contexts?

Timeline of Key Events and Publications

1958: Salimullah Khan born on August 18 in Gorokhata union, Maheshkhali Upazila, Cox's Bazar District.

1971: Liberation War of Bangladesh. Khan is thirteen years old.

1979-1986: Khan edits Praxis Journal.

1983: First book published: Bangladesh: Jatiya Abasthar Chalchitra.

1983-1984: Teaches at University of Rajshahi.

1985-1986: Teaches at University of Dhaka.

1986: Leaves Bangladesh for United States.

1988-1989: Teaches at State University of New York at Purchase.

1993-1998: Teaches at The City University of New York.

1998: Translates selected poems of Dorothee Solle into Bengali.

2000: Completes doctoral dissertation at The New School: Theories of Central Banking in England, 1793-1877.

2001-2002: Teaches at East West University.

2005: Publishes Freud Porar Bhumika.

2005-2012: Professor at Stamford University Bangladesh.

2007: Publishes Satya Saddam Hussein and Behat Biplap 1971.

2008: Publishes Ami Tumi Se.

2009: Publishes Adamboma.

2010: Publishes Ahmed Sofa Sanjibani.

2011: Publishes Swadhinata Byabsay.

2012-2025: Professor at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh; Director, Centre for Advanced Theory.

2013: Strongly supports Shahbagh Movement.

2017: Receives Loke Literary Award.

2020: Receives Ranajit Award; publishes Amader Bhashar Nayak.

2023: Publishes Thakurer Matsyanyay and Utsarga: Paribar Prajati Rashtra.

2024 (July-August): Mass uprising in Bangladesh; Khan delivers speech calling for Hasina's resignation; Hasina flees.

2025 (January-February): Bangla Academy Literary Award announced and then revised amid controversy; Khan receives award but criticizes treatment of recipients.

2025: Joins North South University as Professor in Department of History and Philosophy.

2025 (July): Delivers keynote at seminar on the July uprising and Nazrul's legacy.

2025 (August): Delivers keynote at seminar on July uprising at Jahangirnagar University.

2025 (December): Continues active participation in academic events at North South University.

End of Part One

Part Two: The Lacanian-Marxist Synthesis in Depth: Philosophical Foundations, Internal Tensions, and Analytical Productivity will follow.

Series Editorial Note: This textbook is intended for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in the humanities and social sciences, and for general readers with a serious interest in postcolonial intellectual history. Each Part is designed to be self-contained while building on the foundations laid in previous Parts. Instructors may assign Parts in sequence or selectively according to the needs of their courses. Discussion questions and bibliographies are provided at the end of each Part to facilitate seminar discussion and independent research.

PART TWO: THE LACANIAN-MARXIST SYNTHESIS IN DEPTH

Philosophical Foundations, Internal Tensions, and Analytical Productivity

PREFACE TO PART TWO

Part One of this textbook established the biographical, historical, and broadly theoretical foundations for understanding Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We traced his life from Cox's Bazar to Dhaka to New York and back, we introduced the major thinkers and traditions that have shaped his thinking, and we began to sketch the outlines of the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis that functions as the central organizing framework of his work.

Part Two takes this synthesis as its primary object of analysis. Our goal here is not simply to describe the synthesis but to examine it philosophically: to understand the internal logic of bringing Lacan and Marx together, to identify the tensions and contradictions that this combination generates, and to assess the analytical productivity of the resulting framework when applied to the specific problems that Khan cares about. This requires going deeper into both Lacanian theory and Marxist philosophy than we did in Part One, and it requires asking some

difficult epistemological questions about the status of the claims that the Lacanian-Marxist tradition makes.

We will also, in this Part, situate Khan's version of the synthesis within the broader history of Lacanian Marxism, examining the contributions of Louis Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and others who have worked at the intersection of psychoanalysis and Marxist political theory. Understanding where Khan stands in relation to these other figures will help us to identify what is distinctive about his particular version of the synthesis and what he contributes to the broader conversation.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM OF SYNTHESIS

13.1 Why Synthesis Is Difficult and Why It Is Necessary

The attempt to synthesize Marx and Lacan is not self-evidently coherent. The two traditions start from very different premises, deploy very different conceptual vocabularies, and are addressed to very different sets of questions. Understanding why the synthesis is attempted, and what philosophical work it is supposed to accomplish, is the necessary starting point for any critical assessment.

Marx's project is fundamentally a project of historical explanation and political transformation. He wants to understand how capitalism works, why it produces the forms of exploitation and alienation that it does, how the historical development of capitalism generates the conditions for its own supersession, and what kind of collective political action is required to bring about a genuinely emancipatory social transformation. His explanatory framework is historical and materialist: it begins with the analysis of social production and the specific relations of production that characterize capitalism, and it derives from this analysis an account of ideology, consciousness, culture, and politics that shows these phenomena as ultimately grounded in material conditions.

Lacan's project is fundamentally a project of understanding subjectivity. He wants to explain how human subjects are constituted through their entry into language and the symbolic order, how desire functions as the engine of subjective life, how the unconscious operates as a kind of Other scene that speaks through and despite the conscious subject, and what the implications of these structural features of subjectivity are for our understanding of love, knowledge, ethics, and the social bond. His explanatory framework is structural and linguistic: it begins with the claim that the unconscious is structured like a language, and it derives from this claim an account of the subject as fundamentally divided, alienated from itself, and constitutively oriented toward the Other.

These two projects seem, at first glance, to be addressed to entirely different levels of analysis: Marx at the level of social structure and historical process, Lacan at the level of individual subjectivity and the structural logic of signification. The combination seems to require either that we reduce one level to the other (either reducing subjectivity to social structure or reducing

social structure to a projection of subjective dynamics) or that we maintain both levels as irreducibly distinct while somehow articulating their relationship.

The Lacanian-Marxist tradition has, in various ways, attempted to navigate this difficulty. Khan's version of the navigation is to treat the two frameworks as complementary rather than competing: each illuminates a dimension of social reality that the other cannot adequately address, and the most adequate analysis requires both. This is a reasonable methodological position, but it requires careful philosophical work to specify how the two frameworks relate to each other and to ensure that the combination does not simply produce an eclectic mixing of incompatible concepts.

13.2 Althusser: The First Systematic Attempt

The first major systematic attempt to bring Lacan and Marx together was the work of the French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990), and Khan's Lacanian Marxism stands in a complex relationship to this tradition. Althusser was a member of the French Communist Party and a professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure who, in the 1960s and 1970s, developed an influential reinterpretation of Marx that drew on Lacan's structural concepts.

Althusser's key move was to argue that Marx's mature work (*Capital* and the surrounding texts) represents a radical epistemological break from his early work (the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*), a break that produced a genuinely scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production. The early Marx was, on this reading, still caught within the humanist problematic of his predecessors: he analyzed capitalism in terms of alienation, the estrangement of the human essence, and he appealed implicitly to a concept of authentic human nature that capitalism distorted. The mature Marx, by contrast, analyzed capitalism as a structure, a set of relations that operates independently of the intentions and consciousness of the individuals who are its bearers.

This structural reading of Marx connected to Lacan in two ways. First, Althusser adopted Lacan's concept of structural causality: the idea that a social structure is not simply the sum of its parts but is a whole that determines the relations between its elements. Just as for Lacan the subject is not simply an individual consciousness but is constituted by its place within the symbolic order, so for Althusser the social formation is not simply the sum of individual actions but is constituted by the relations of production that structure it.

Second, and more influentially for subsequent intellectual history, Althusser used Lacan's concept of the Imaginary to develop his famous theory of ideology. In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), Althusser argued that ideology is not simply false consciousness, not simply a set of false beliefs that prevent people from seeing the truth of their situation. Ideology is, rather, a system of representations (images, myths, ideas, concepts) through which individuals live their relation to the conditions of their existence. It is always already material (embodied in practices, rituals, institutions) and it functions by "interpellating" individuals as subjects: hailing them, calling them by name, giving them an identity within the social order.

The concept of interpellation, the idea that ideology calls subjects into being by positioning them within a set of social relations, draws directly on Lacan's account of how subjects are constituted through the symbolic order. The subject of ideology, like the subject of the unconscious, is not a pre-given individual who then acquires an ideology; the ideology itself is the mechanism through which the individual becomes a subject in the first place. This insight radically complicates any simple model of ideological manipulation: we cannot simply expose the ideology and thereby free the subject from it, because the subject has no existence outside the ideological forms through which it is constituted.

Althusser's contribution to the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis was enormously influential, but it also attracted sharp criticism. Critics argued that his structural anti-humanism left no room for agency: if subjects are constituted by structures (whether the symbolic order or the ideological state apparatuses), how can they resist or transform those structures? How can there be revolutionary political practice if all subjects are simply bearers of the structural relations that define them?

This criticism points to a genuine tension in the Lacanian-Marxist framework that Khan has had to navigate, and his response to it is one of the most interesting aspects of his intellectual project.

13.3 The Problem of Agency: Between Structure and Practice

The tension between structure and agency is one of the central tensions in all of social theory, and it is particularly acute in the Lacanian-Marxist tradition. If social structures (the relations of production, the symbolic order) determine the forms of subjectivity available in any given social formation, how is radical social transformation possible? How can subjects break free from the ideological and symbolic constraints that constitute them in order to act in ways that challenge and potentially overthrow those constraints?

Althusser's critics, including his former student Nicos Poulantzas and, more pointedly, E. P. Thompson in his polemical essay *The Poverty of Theory*, argued that the structural Marxism of the Althusserian school dissolved the human agents who make history into mere supports of structural relations, making revolution theoretically impossible and politically disempowering. Thompson's alternative, developed in his monumental *The Making of the English Working Class* and other historical works, emphasized the active, creative role of working people in making their own history, even under conditions not of their own choosing.

Khan's position on this debate is informed by his reading of both Althusser and the more agentive traditions of Marxist historical writing, as well as by his engagement with Fanon, whose account of decolonization gives a central role to the agency of the colonized in transforming their own consciousness and political situation. His response to the agency problem in the Lacanian-Marxist framework is to locate agency not at the level of the individual subject (who is indeed constituted by structures) but at the level of collective political practice.

This response draws on the concept of articulation, developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their important work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). Laclau and Mouffe argued, drawing on both Lacanian theory and Gramsci's concept of hegemony, that political

identities and social demands are not fixed or pre-given but are constituted through political practice: through the way in which different social groups articulate their demands into broader political projects, form alliances, construct collective identities, and contest the terrain of hegemony. This concept of articulation provides a way of understanding political agency that does not simply reduce it to structural determination: the specific forms that political movements take, the alliances they form, the identities they construct, are the result of conscious political work rather than the automatic expression of underlying structural conditions.

For Khan, the Liberation War of 1971 provides the paradigmatic example of this kind of politically constructed agency. The people who made the Liberation War were not simply expressing a pre-given Bengali national identity or the automatic interests of their class positions; they were constructing a new political identity through the practice of the struggle itself. This is what Khan means when he says that the Liberation War was a revolution: not just a nationalist movement for political independence, but a moment of genuinely transformative political practice in which new forms of collective identity and new visions of the social order were being forged.

13.4 The Logic of the Signifier: Language, Desire, and Political Discourse

One of the most productive aspects of the Lacanian contribution to political analysis is the concept of the signifier and the way in which political discourse is organized around what Lacan calls "master signifiers" or "empty signifiers." This concept has been most systematically developed by Ernesto Laclau in his analysis of populism and hegemony, and Khan has drawn on it in his analysis of Bangladeshi political discourse.

For Lacan, a signifier is not a word that simply refers to a thing in the world; it is an element in a system of differences that acquires meaning through its relationships to other signifiers rather than through direct reference to a non-linguistic reality. This means that meaning is never fixed or stable: it is always the result of an ongoing process of articulation and rearticulation, in which signifiers are linked to each other in ways that produce different meanings in different contexts.

In political discourse, certain signifiers acquire a special status: they become "nodal points" or "master signifiers" that seem to hold together an entire system of meaning, to give coherence and identity to a political project. "Bangladesh," "Bengali," "liberation," "democracy," "justice": these are nodal points in Bangladeshi political discourse, signifiers around which political identities are organized and political contests are conducted. Their power as political signifiers lies partly in their emptiness: they are defined not by a fixed referent but by their opposition to other signifiers ("Pakistan," "Urdu," "occupation," "authoritarianism," "injustice"), and this means that different political forces can invest them with different contents while using the same words.

Khan's analysis of Bangladeshi political discourse uses this Lacanian framework to illuminate how apparently shared political commitments can conceal deeply different understandings of what those commitments mean. When both secular nationalists and Islamist parties claim to be in favor of "Bangladesh" and "Bengali culture," they are not simply disagreeing about policy; they are contesting the meaning of the master signifiers through which political identity is organized.

The contest over meaning is itself a form of political struggle, and understanding it requires the kind of attention to discourse and signification that the Lacanian framework provides.

13.5 Zizek: The Ideology of the Fantasy

Slavoj Zizek (born 1949), the Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic, is the figure who has most successfully developed the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis in ways that have reached a broad international audience. His prolific output, combining dense Lacanian theoretical analysis with the analysis of popular culture, political ideology, and contemporary political events, has made him perhaps the most widely read theorist working in the Lacanian-Marxist tradition today.

Zizek's central contribution to the synthesis is his analysis of ideology through the Lacanian concept of fantasy. Where Althusser analyzed ideology primarily through the concept of the Imaginary (ideology as the imaginary lived relation to one's real conditions of existence), Zizek argues that the most fundamental operation of ideology is the organization of social reality around a fantasy structure that supports the subject's relation to the social Real.

The key Zizekian insight is that ideology does not primarily work by making people believe false things; it works by organizing their desire and their enjoyment around a fantasy scenario that makes the existing social order seem natural, inevitable, and, crucially, enjoyable. Ideology is not just a set of ideas imposed from outside; it is embedded in the practices and enjoyments of everyday social life, in the rituals, the jokes, the customs, and the modes of enjoyment that constitute a social world. This means that ideological critique cannot simply expose the falseness of ideological beliefs; it must also grapple with the enjoyment that ideology provides, with the *jouissance* that is bound up with social identification and social practice.

Khan's engagement with Zizek is selective and critical. He finds the Zizekian analysis of ideology illuminating for understanding how political formations maintain their hold on subjects even when those subjects are aware of their contradictions: the Bangladeshi who knows that the ruling class does not actually care about ordinary people but who continues to vote for it out of habit, fear, or a residual sense of identification, is exhibiting precisely the kind of ideological "cynical reason" that Zizek analyzes. But Khan is also aware of the limitations of Zizek's approach: its tendency toward cultural universalism (reading every political situation through the same theoretical framework, with insufficient attention to historical and cultural specificity) and its sometimes cavalier attitude toward the actual material conditions of suffering and exploitation.

13.6 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony and the Logic of Equivalence

Ernesto Laclau (1935-2014) and Chantal Mouffe (born 1943), whose collaborative work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) is one of the most important texts in the post-Althusserian Lacanian-Marxist tradition, have developed an analysis of politics that Khan has drawn on significantly in his analysis of Bangladeshi political formations.

Laclau and Mouffe's central argument is that political identities and collective wills are not pre-given by structural positions (class, gender, ethnicity) but are discursively constructed through

the practice of hegemony. They use Lacan's concepts of the signifier and of lack to argue that every social identity is constituted through its exclusion of something (every "we" is defined against a "them"), and that political struggle consists of the contestation over which exclusions will be primary: which difference will function as the fundamental antagonism around which political identities are organized.

Their concept of "the logic of equivalence" is particularly useful for analyzing populist political formations: when different social groups with different specific demands (workers demanding better wages, students demanding educational reform, women demanding reproductive rights, minorities demanding recognition) are articulated together into a broader political movement by being positioned as equivalent in their opposition to a common adversary (the ruling class, the colonial state, the corrupt establishment), a hegemonic project is being constructed.

Khan uses this framework implicitly in his analysis of the Liberation War and of subsequent political formations in Bangladesh. The Liberation War was a moment of hegemonic construction: disparate groups with different specific interests and demands were articulated together into a political unity by their shared opposition to the Pakistani military state. The subsequent history of Bangladeshi politics can be read as a series of failed or partial attempts to construct new hegemonic projects that would give coherent form to the aspirations of the population after independence.

13.7 The Limits of the Synthesis: What Lacan Cannot Do for Marx

Having examined the various ways in which the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis has been developed, we are now in a position to assess its limitations as well as its achievements. The synthesis is productive, but it is not without problems, and intellectual honesty requires us to confront those problems directly.

The first and most fundamental limitation is epistemological. Lacan's theory of the subject, with its claims about the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, is not an empirically testable theory in any straightforward sense. Lacan himself insisted that psychoanalysis was a practice rather than a science in the natural-scientific sense, and that its claims were validated through clinical practice rather than experimental testing. The application of Lacanian concepts to social and political phenomena takes them even further from any kind of empirical grounding.

This does not mean that Lacanian concepts are without value in social analysis; as we have argued, they function as heuristic tools that illuminate certain dimensions of social phenomena. But it does mean that claims made on the basis of Lacanian analysis have a different epistemological status from claims made on the basis of empirical social research, and conflating the two produces a kind of theoretical hubris that can lead to confident assertions about social reality that are in fact highly speculative.

Khan is generally aware of this limitation and is careful to use Lacanian concepts as frameworks for interpretation rather than as empirical claims. But in some of his more polemical writing, particularly his sharp characterizations of the ruling class as "perverts" or his confident assertions

about the psychic dynamics of political movements, the epistemological modesty that good theoretical practice requires is sometimes sacrificed to rhetorical effect.

The second limitation concerns the relationship between structure and history. Lacan's theory is essentially synchronic: it describes the structural conditions of subjectivity in general rather than the historically specific forms that those conditions take in different social contexts. The Name of the Father, the objet petit a, the Symbolic order: these are presented as universal structural features of the human condition rather than as historically variable formations. But if this is the case, it is not clear how the Lacanian framework can be combined with the diachronic, historical orientation of Marxist analysis without simply using Lacanian concepts as ahistorical labels that are stuck onto historical phenomena without illuminating their specific historical character.

Khan navigates this tension by treating Lacanian concepts as formal structures whose content varies historically: the specific forms that the symbolic order takes, the specific contents of the master signifier, the specific configurations of desire and jouissance that characterize a given social formation, are historically produced, even if the structural forms themselves are universal. This is a reasonable position, but it requires careful attention to the relationship between the formal and the material in each specific case of analysis.

The third limitation concerns the political implications of the synthesis. Marxist political theory has a clear telos: the overcoming of capitalism and the establishment of a form of social organization in which human beings can collectively determine the conditions of their existence. Lacanian theory, by contrast, is deeply skeptical about any political project that promises to overcome fundamental lack and division: for Lacan, the promise of wholeness, unity, and complete satisfaction is precisely the structure of fantasy, and the political movements that promise such things are likely to generate the most dangerous forms of jouissance, the most violent and destructive forms of political identification.

This Lacanian skepticism about political utopias creates a tension with the Marxist commitment to emancipatory politics. Khan's resolution of this tension is to distinguish between two kinds of political hope: the fantasmatic promise of complete satisfaction and full jouissance (which Lacan rightly identifies as dangerous) and the more modest, but genuinely emancipatory, promise of reduced exploitation, greater equality, and more adequate conditions for human dignity (which is what Khan understands by the revolutionary promise of the Liberation War). This distinction is philosophically defensible, but it requires ongoing vigilance to ensure that the political commitments of the Lacanian-Marxist intellectual do not themselves take on the character of fantasmatic over-investment.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: MARXIST POLITICAL ECONOMY IN KHAN'S WORK

14.1 Value, Exploitation, and the Colonial Economy

Khan's Marxist framework is not simply philosophical; it has concrete analytical implications for his understanding of the political economy of Bangladesh. At the center of Marxist political

economy is the labor theory of value: the claim that the value of commodities is determined by the socially necessary labor time required to produce them, and that the profit extracted by capitalists represents the surplus value created by workers over and above the value of their own labor power.

This basic framework, already introduced in Part One in the context of Khan's doctoral dissertation, provides the foundation for his analysis of the Bangladeshi economy and its position within the global capitalist system. Bangladesh is a country with a particular position in global value chains: it is primarily a site of labor-intensive manufacturing (above all, the garment industry, which makes Bangladesh the world's second-largest exporter of ready-made garments after China) and a source of migrant labor whose remittances are a major component of national income. Understanding Bangladesh's economic situation requires understanding how value is produced and extracted in this specific configuration.

The garment industry is a particularly rich object of analysis through the Marxist framework. The typical structure of the industry involves global brands (operating primarily in the United States, Europe, and Japan) that control the high-value-added ends of the value chain (design, branding, retail) while outsourcing the labor-intensive manufacturing to low-wage producers in countries like Bangladesh. The wages paid to Bangladeshi garment workers (primarily women, typically young, often from rural backgrounds) are extremely low by international standards, but they are connected to the global system of commodity production through the orders of the global brands. The difference between the price that the global brands pay for garments and the price at which those garments are sold to consumers in rich countries represents, in Marxist terms, the appropriation of the surplus value created by Bangladeshi workers.

Khan does not simply describe this situation; he analyzes its political and social dimensions. The Bangladeshi state's willingness to maintain the conditions (low wages, weak labor regulations, suppression of independent trade unions) that make Bangladesh an attractive location for garment manufacturing is, in his analysis, a form of collaboration with global capital against the interests of the Bangladeshi working class. This collaboration has a specific class basis: the Bangladeshi political elite that manages the garment sector has its own stake in maintaining low wages and political docility among workers, since many members of this elite are themselves garment factory owners or have financial interests in the industry.

14.2 Dependency Theory and Bangladesh's Global Position

Beyond the specific analysis of the garment industry, Khan's political economy draws on the tradition of dependency theory, which was developed by Latin American economists and social scientists in the 1950s through 1970s and which provides a framework for understanding the structural disadvantages faced by peripheral economies in their relationship with the capitalist center.

Dependency theorists like Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Raul Prebisch argued that the underdevelopment of peripheral economies is not a stage through which they are passing on the way to the kind of development achieved by the advanced capitalist countries; it is, rather, a structural condition produced and maintained by the integration of peripheral economies into the

world capitalist system in a subordinate position. The surplus created in peripheral economies is systematically transferred to the center through the mechanisms of unequal exchange (in which peripheral countries export primary commodities and labor-intensive manufactures at low prices while importing capital goods and technology at high prices), financial transfers (debt service, profit repatriation), and the brain drain that takes educated and talented people from peripheral to core countries.

Khan applies this dependency framework to the Bangladeshi situation, arguing that Bangladesh's position in the global economy is not simply the result of its internal conditions (lack of capital, technology, or education) but is structurally determined by the terms on which it has been integrated into the world capitalist system. The colonial period established these terms: Bangladesh (as part of Bengal and then East Pakistan) was integrated into the world economy as a supplier of raw materials (jute was the most important) and as a market for manufactured goods from the metropolitan center, and this integration destroyed the existing textile industry and other forms of artisanal production while failing to create the kind of diversified industrial base that could support sustained economic development.

The post-independence period has not fundamentally altered these structural conditions: Bangladesh has moved from exporting raw jute to exporting garments, but it remains a supplier of low-wage labor to global value chains rather than a producer of high-value-added goods and services that would allow it to escape the developmental trap of the peripheral economy.

14.3 The Agrarian Question and Rural Bangladesh

Khan's political economy also engages with what Marxist political economists call "the agrarian question": the question of how the relationship between agricultural and industrial production shapes the broader dynamics of capitalist development. This question is particularly important in the context of Bangladesh, which remains a predominantly rural country (though urbanization is rapidly proceeding) with an agricultural sector that is still crucial for the livelihoods of a significant portion of the population.

The history of agrarian relations in Bengal is marked by the legacy of the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which we discussed in Part One. The Permanent Settlement created a class of landlords (zamindars) with permanent, heritable, and saleable rights over land, setting fixed revenue payments to the colonial state and allowing the zamindars to extract whatever they could from the actual cultivators. The result was a complex and exploitative hierarchy of landlord, sub-landlord, and tenant that persisted in various forms through the colonial period and beyond.

The abolition of the zamindari system after independence (in East Pakistan in 1950, and confirmed in Bangladesh after 1971) did not eliminate agrarian inequality; it transformed its character. Large landholdings were broken up, but the political economy of rural Bangladesh remained marked by significant inequality in landholding, by the vulnerability of small farmers to indebtedness and dispossession, and by the persistence of various forms of extra-economic coercion and dependency in rural social relations.

Khan's analysis of this situation draws on the Marxist tradition of agrarian studies, from Lenin's analysis of the agrarian question in Russia to the work of more recent scholars like Jan Breman (whose studies of unfree labor in South Asia have been particularly influential). He is interested not just in the economic dimensions of agrarian inequality but in its social and political dimensions: the way in which relations of agrarian exploitation are sustained by cultural norms, by patron-client networks, and by the political power of rural elites, and the way in which these relations shape the political consciousness and the political organization of the rural poor.

14.4 Microfinance, NGOs, and the Political Economy of Development

Bangladesh is internationally known as a site of innovation in development policy, particularly through the microfinance programs pioneered by the Grameen Bank (founded by Muhammad Yunus, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006) and the extensive network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have made Bangladesh home to some of the world's largest development organizations (including BRAC, originally the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee).

Khan's attitude toward the microfinance model and the broader NGO development approach is critical, and his critique is rooted in his Marxist political economy. He argues that microfinance, despite its rhetoric of empowerment and poverty reduction, does not challenge the structural conditions that produce poverty; it adapts the poor to those conditions by integrating them more fully into the market economy, often through the mechanism of debt. The microfinance borrower who takes a small loan to establish a small business is not being empowered in any structural sense; she is being incorporated into the global financial system as a micro-debtor, adding to the profitability of the microfinance industry while facing the risks of market competition with very limited capital.

This critique draws on the work of various scholars who have studied the microfinance sector critically, including Milford Bateman (whose book *Why Doesn't Microfinance Work?* provides an extensive empirical critique of microfinance's development claims) and Muhammad Yunus's critics within Bangladesh, who have argued that the Grameen Bank model is primarily a financial institution that serves its own institutional interests rather than a poverty-reduction program that serves its borrowers.

Khan's critique of the NGO sector more broadly is similarly structural. He sees the large Bangladeshi NGOs as occupying a space that in a properly functioning state would be occupied by public institutions: providing education, healthcare, and social services to the population. But because they operate on the basis of external funding (primarily from Western aid agencies and foundations) and within the framework of market-oriented development ideology, they substitute for rather than challenge the state's failure to meet its social obligations, and they depoliticize social problems by treating them as technical challenges to be addressed through programmatic interventions rather than as political problems to be addressed through collective action.

14.5 The Political Economy of Language Policy

One of the most intellectually original dimensions of Khan's economic analysis is his application of political economy frameworks to the question of language policy. This might seem like an unusual application of economic analysis, but Khan's argument is that the choice of language in education is not just a cultural or pedagogical question; it is also an economic question, with real implications for the distribution of economic opportunities and the reproduction of class inequality.

His argument runs as follows. The preference for English-medium education in Bangladesh is not simply a matter of cultural prestige; it is also a matter of economic rationality, given that access to the most prestigious and remunerative positions in the Bangladeshi economy (in the corporate sector, in the international development industry, in the professions that serve global markets) requires high-level English language proficiency. English is, in Bourdieu's terms, a form of cultural capital that is unequally distributed between those who can afford English-medium schooling (primarily the urban upper and middle classes) and those who cannot (the rural poor and the urban working class who attend Bengali-medium government schools).

This unequal distribution of linguistic capital reproduces class inequality across generations: children from privileged backgrounds acquire English-language skills that give them access to privileged positions in the economy and the state, while children from working-class backgrounds, educated in Bengali-medium schools of variable quality, face systematic disadvantage in competition for the most desirable positions. The meritocratic ideology that presents these outcomes as the result of individual talent and effort conceals the structural advantages that English-language education confers.

Khan's proposed solution, the establishment of Bengali as the universal medium of higher education, would, he argues, undermine this mechanism of class reproduction by eliminating the systematic advantage that English-medium schooling confers. This is an ambitious and controversial policy proposal, and it raises real questions about how Bangladesh would compete in a globalized economy if its educated population did not have high levels of English proficiency. But Khan's argument is that the current system's costs (in terms of inequality, cultural alienation, and the stunting of genuine intellectual development) outweigh its benefits, and that a well-designed mother-tongue-based educational system can achieve both deeper learning and competitive language skills if English is taught as a subject rather than used as a medium of instruction.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE UNCONSCIOUS OF POLITICS: FANTASY, SYMPTOM, AND POLITICAL DESIRE

15.1 The Political Unconscious

Fredric Jameson, the American Marxist literary critic, introduced the concept of the "political unconscious" in his influential 1981 book of that title, arguing that cultural texts always contain, beneath their manifest content, a political dimension that organizes their deeper structure. This

concept, which draws on both Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, provides a useful entry point into Khan's approach to cultural and political analysis.

For Khan, the political unconscious of Bangladeshi culture and politics is organized around the traumatic experience of the Liberation War and its aftermath. The war was not just a political event; it was a collective trauma that left deep psychic traces in the Bangladeshi national psyche. The mass killings, the systematic rape of women, the destruction of entire communities, the forced displacement of millions of people: these experiences were too overwhelming to be simply processed and integrated into collective memory. They were instead subject to various forms of social repression, collective amnesia, and ideological displacement.

The return of this repressed material takes various forms in Bangladeshi political and cultural life. The periodic eruption of mass protests and political upheavals can be understood, in part, as symptomatic expressions of the unprocessed trauma of 1971: the gap between the promises of the revolution and the realities of post-independence life generates a chronic political discontent that periodically breaks the surface. The obsession with the question of war crimes and the number of martyrs is another symptomatic expression: the need to quantify and officially recognize the losses of 1971 reflects the difficulty of collectively mourning an experience of mass death that has never been fully acknowledged.

Khan's analysis of these phenomena draws on the Freudian concept of working-through (*Durcharbeitung*): the therapeutic process through which a traumatic experience is gradually integrated into the subject's history through a combination of remembering, repeating, and mourning. His argument is that Bangladeshi society has not yet achieved the kind of collective working-through that would allow it to relate to the experience of 1971 in a way that is productive rather than symptomatic, to draw on the revolutionary energy of that moment without being imprisoned by its unresolved contradictions.

15.2 National Fantasy and Its Discontents

Every successful political community sustains itself through what we might call a "national fantasy": a shared imaginative construction of who "we" are, where "we" came from, what "we" stand for, and what kind of future "we" are working toward. This national fantasy is not simply a set of beliefs; it is a structure of desire, a way of organizing collective longing and hope in relation to a shared ideal or telos.

The national fantasy of Bangladesh, as Khan analyzes it, is organized around the experience of 1971: the heroic struggle for liberation, the unity of the Bengali people against the Pakistani oppressor, the promise of a new society founded on equality, dignity, and justice. This fantasy serves important functions: it provides a sense of collective identity, it offers a moral foundation for political life, and it sustains the hope that the suffering of the Liberation War was not in vain.

But the national fantasy also generates specific forms of distress when reality fails to match the ideal it projects. The persistent corruption, inequality, and authoritarianism of Bangladeshi political life represent a chronic gap between the ideal (the just, democratic, equitable Bangladesh that the Liberation War promised) and the real (the actual political and social

conditions of the country). This gap produces a characteristic political affect: a mixture of pride (in the achievement of 1971), shame (at the failure to realize its promise), and anger (at those who are held responsible for that failure), combined with periodic eruptions of mass political energy that seek to close the gap by forcing reality to conform to the ideal.

Khan's analysis identifies this affective structure and traces its consequences for Bangladeshi political culture. The tendency to cycle between moments of utopian hope (as in the immediate post-independence period, the Shahbagh Movement, or the July 2024 uprising) and moments of cynicism and disillusionment is, on this reading, a structural feature of a political culture organized around an unrealized national fantasy.

15.3 The Symptom as Political Category

One of Lacan's most important contributions to social analysis, developed by Žižek in his analysis of ideology, is the concept of the symptom as a social category. In Lacanian theory, the symptom is not simply a pathological formation to be eliminated; it is a message from the unconscious, a disguised expression of a truth that cannot be directly spoken. The symptom maintains the subject's equilibrium by giving form to an otherwise unbearable jouissance, and its elimination requires not just symptom management but the interpretation and working-through of the underlying conflict.

Applied to social and political analysis, this concept suggests that the symptoms of a social formation (its characteristic forms of violence, its recurring political crises, its apparently irrational collective behaviors) are not simply pathological disturbances to be managed but messages from the social unconscious, expressions of contradictions and conflicts that the social order cannot openly acknowledge. The analyst's task is not simply to manage the symptoms but to interpret them: to ask what truth they express, what conflict they embody, what contradiction they make visible.

Khan applies this framework to various symptoms of Bangladeshi political life. The recurrence of political violence, for instance, is not (on his analysis) simply the result of a culture of violence or of the irrationality of specific political actors; it is a symptom of the unresolved contradictions of the postcolonial state, of the gap between the formal democracy promised by the constitution and the actual power relations that govern political life. The persistence of communal conflict is a symptom of the unresolved tensions between the Bengali Muslim cultural identity of the majority and the secular-nationalist ideology of the state, a tension that the official discourse of nationalism tends to suppress rather than address.

15.4 Love, Recognition, and Political Community

Khan's engagement with psychoanalytic theory extends to the question of love and recognition, and their relationship to political community. This might seem a surprising dimension of political analysis, but it connects to some of the deepest questions in political philosophy: what holds a political community together? What are the affective bonds that make collective political life possible? And how do those bonds relate to the formal institutional structures of law and government?

Lacan's analysis of love is paradoxical: he argues that love is always mediated by the Other, that what we love in the other person is not the person as such but the object in them that corresponds to our own desire (the objet petit a). This means that love is always, at some level, a narcissistic formation: we love others insofar as they reflect back to us something about our own desire, insofar as they seem to possess what we lack. But Lacan also argues that genuine love involves a recognition of the other's radical difference and irreducibility, a willingness to encounter the other in their singularity rather than simply as a screen for our own projections.

Khan applies this analysis to the question of political solidarity, drawing an implicit distinction between two kinds of political community: the imaginary community organized around shared identity and the mirroring of the self in the other (the community of those "like us") and the more genuinely political community organized around a shared commitment to values and a shared recognition of difference. The former kind of community tends toward exclusion and violence: it maintains its unity by expelling or persecuting those who are different (religious minorities, political dissidents, ethnic others). The latter kind of community, which Khan associates with the best traditions of the Liberation War, is capable of genuine solidarity across difference.

15.5 Melancholia and Incomplete Mourning in Post-Liberation Bangladesh

Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia provides another framework that Khan has deployed in his analysis of Bangladeshi political culture. For Freud, mourning is the healthy process of gradually withdrawing libidinal investment from a lost object (a person, a place, an ideal, a possibility) and eventually redirecting that investment toward new objects. Melancholia, by contrast, is a pathological state in which the loss cannot be mourned: the subject clings to the lost object in a self-punishing way, unable to let go and move forward, and turns the aggression that cannot be directed toward the lost object against the self.

In the context of collective political life, melancholia describes a political culture that is unable to mourn its losses and move forward: that clings to the failures and betrayals of the past in a way that prevents it from engaging creatively with the possibilities of the present. Khan's analysis suggests that Bangladeshi political culture has, in certain of its dimensions, taken a melancholic form: the inability to achieve adequate closure around the trauma and promise of 1971 has produced a political culture that is haunted by the past, that repeatedly returns to the unresolved questions of the Liberation War, and that has difficulty imagining new political possibilities that are not simply iterations of old conflicts.

The cure for political melancholia, as for individual melancholia, is not simply to forget the past but to achieve a more adequate relationship to it: to mourn what was lost (the unrealized potential of 1971, the lives of those who died, the promise of the revolution), to acknowledge the failures and betrayals without either idealization or denunciation, and to find in the past not a prison but a resource for understanding the present and imagining the future.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS, IDEOLOGY, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

16.1 Can There Be False Consciousness?

One of the most contested concepts in the Marxist tradition is the concept of "false consciousness": the idea that people can hold beliefs about their social situation that systematically misrepresent the actual conditions of their lives and the actual causes of their suffering, and that these mistaken beliefs serve the interests of the dominant class by preventing the oppressed from recognizing the nature of their exploitation and organizing to resist it.

The concept of false consciousness raises immediate philosophical objections. If I believe that X, how can you say that I am wrong about my own beliefs and interests? Does the concept not imply an unjustified paternalism on the part of the intellectual who claims to know the "true" interests of the workers better than the workers themselves? And is there not a circularity in the argument, since the claim that a particular form of consciousness is false seems to presuppose access to a "true" consciousness that is not itself ideologically distorted?

These are serious objections, and they have been taken seriously by Marxist theorists since at least Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), which introduced the concept of "reification" (the process through which social relations come to appear as natural and thing-like) as a more sophisticated alternative to crude false consciousness claims. Althusser's theory of ideology, as we discussed earlier, is another attempt to navigate these difficulties: ideology is not simply false (in the sense of a set of false beliefs that could be corrected by simple factual information) but is a structural condition of social subjectivity that organizes the subject's lived relation to the social world.

Khan's position on this question is broadly Althusserian: he does not use the concept of false consciousness in its naive form, but he does maintain that ideology functions to systematically obscure the real conditions of social life, and that this ideological mystification serves the interests of the dominant class. His contribution to the debate is to use the Lacanian framework to show how ideology operates not just at the level of beliefs and ideas but at the level of desire, identification, and jouissance: ideology is not just something people believe, it is something they enjoy.

16.2 The Intellectual and the Masses: Who Speaks for Whom?

The concept of false consciousness raises the acutely political question of the relationship between the intellectual and the masses. If ordinary people are systematically misled about their own interests by ideology, is it the role of the intellectual to enlighten them? And does this role not reproduce the very hierarchy between the educated elite and the uneducated masses that radical politics is supposed to challenge?

This dilemma is acutely felt in the postcolonial context, where the educated elite (including the critical intellectual like Khan) is a product of the same colonial educational system that has shaped the forms of consciousness and the class hierarchies that are under critique. The critical intellectual who claims to be speaking for the oppressed is always already implicated in the structures of power that produce oppression, and this implication cannot be simply dissolved by good intentions or theoretical sophistication.

Khan confronts this dilemma with characteristic directness. He does not pretend that the tension between intellectual authority and popular sovereignty can be fully resolved, but he argues for a specific practice of intellectual work that is attentive to this tension and that seeks, as far as possible, to mitigate rather than reproduce it. This practice involves: speaking in Bengali rather than English (so that intellectual work is accessible to those who are not English-educated); engaging with popular cultural forms (folk music, cinema, television) rather than confining critical work to the academy; explicitly acknowledging the intellectual's own class position and its potential distortions; and consistently orienting intellectual work toward the question of how ordinary people can be enabled to understand and transform their own situation rather than simply providing them with the correct analysis developed elsewhere.

This practice is not perfect, and Khan has been criticized from various directions: from those who argue that his Bengali advocacy is itself a form of elite cultural politics that idealizes the rural and the popular at the expense of nuanced analysis, and from those who argue that his television appearances and newspaper columns have made him more of a media personality than a rigorous intellectual. These criticisms have some force, and a serious engagement with Khan's work requires taking them seriously rather than simply defending him against all criticism.

16.3 Gramscian Organic Intellectualism and Khan's Self-Positioning

As we noted in Part One, Khan's understanding of the intellectual's role draws significantly on Gramsci's distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals. But the question of whether Khan himself functions as an organic intellectual (connected to and expressing the interests of a particular class or social force) is a complex one.

On one reading, Khan positions himself as an organic intellectual of the Bangladeshi subaltern classes: the rural poor, the urban working class, the garment workers, the people who made the Liberation War and whose revolutionary aspirations were betrayed by the national bourgeoisie that came to power after independence. His political commitments, his advocacy for Bengali-medium education, his critique of the ruling class's linguistic and cultural pretensions, all of these can be read as expressions of an organic connection to the interests of the majority.

But on another reading, Khan is as much a traditional intellectual as an organic one: he is a highly educated cosmopolitan figure (educated in Dhaka and New York, familiar with the intellectual traditions of multiple continents), embedded in the institutional structures of the university and the media, and drawing on a theoretical framework (Lacanian Marxism) that is in many ways the most rarefied and inaccessible tradition in the contemporary humanistic academy. His critique of the ruling class's anglophile pretensions is made from a position of someone who is himself deeply versed in the European intellectual tradition, and this creates a kind of performative contradiction that requires acknowledgment.

Khan's awareness of this tension is evident in some of his more self-reflexive writing, where he acknowledges the paradoxes of his own position as a Bengali-speaking advocate for Bengali who writes and speaks using concepts developed by French and German theorists. His response is not to pretend that the contradiction does not exist but to insist that the contradiction can itself be

theoretically productive: that the encounter between the European theoretical tradition and the Bangladeshi social reality can generate insights that neither would produce in isolation.

16.4 Enlightenment, Critique, and the Dialectic of Modernity

Khan's engagement with questions of consciousness, ideology, and enlightenment connects to a broader engagement with the legacy of the Enlightenment and the tradition of critique that it inaugurated. The Enlightenment, with its twin commitments to reason and emancipation, to the use of critical reason to unmask the superstitions and illegitimate authorities that kept human beings in a condition of self-incurred immaturity (in Kant's famous formulation), is both a resource and a problem for postcolonial critical thought.

It is a resource because the tools of critical reason, the commitment to argument, evidence, and rational justification, are indispensable for the kind of intellectual work that Khan does. The critique of ideology, the exposure of the class interests concealed behind apparently universal principles, the analysis of how power operates through apparently neutral institutions: all of these require the use of reason in a way that is recognizably continuous with the Enlightenment tradition of critique.

But it is also a problem because the Enlightenment was not only a tradition of critique; it was also a tradition of colonial domination. The same period that saw the development of the rights of man in France and the critique of traditional authority saw the intensification of the slave trade, the establishment of new forms of colonial rule, and the development of racial theories that justified the subordination of non-European peoples. The universalist claims of the Enlightenment were, as postcolonial theorists have extensively documented, systematically applied in ways that excluded colonized peoples from the circle of the fully human.

Khan's response to this dialectic of Enlightenment, a term borrowed from the title of Horkheimer and Adorno's famous critique of the Enlightenment, is to insist on a dialectical engagement with the tradition: to use its tools against its limitations, to appropriate the critical potential of the Enlightenment while refusing its exclusions and its complicity with colonial power. This is a characteristically dialectical move, one that refuses both the simple affirmation and the simple rejection of the tradition, and that seeks instead to transform it through the pressure of the experiences and perspectives it has historically excluded.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE ETHICS OF THE LACANIAN-MARXIST INTELLECTUAL

17.1 Ethics Between Theory and Practice

The question of ethics occupies a complex place in both the Lacanian and the Marxist traditions, and their combination generates specific ethical challenges that Khan's intellectual practice must navigate. The Marxist tradition has generally been suspicious of ethics as a domain of thought: from Marx's critique of the "rights of man" as a mystification of bourgeois individualism to

Althusser's "theoretical anti-humanism" that rejected appeals to human nature or essential human values, the Marxist tradition has tended to see ethics as ideology in disguise, as the moral superstructure through which class interests are presented as universal principles.

Lacan, for his part, developed a distinctive ethics of psychoanalysis that is organized not around the satisfaction of desire but around what he calls the "second death" beyond the first: the willingness to pursue desire to its conclusion, to not give way on one's desire (ne pas céder sur son désir), even when this requires confronting what is most disturbing and most destabilizing in the subject's own investment. This ethics is not a conventional morality; it is a kind of fidelity to the truth of one's own desire, a refusal of the comfortable compromises and self-deceptions through which subjects typically manage their relationship to their desire.

For a political intellectual like Khan, the tension between the Marxist suspicion of ethics and the Lacanian ethics of desire creates a specific challenge: how to maintain political commitments without falling into the moralism that the Marxist tradition rightly criticizes, and how to maintain fidelity to the truth of one's analysis without the kind of political disengagement that a purely personal ethics might imply.

17.2 Fidelity to the Event: Badiou and the Question of Revolutionary Commitment

Another philosophical resource that connects to Khan's engagement with the ethics of political commitment is the work of Alain Badiou (born 1937), the French philosopher who has developed a theory of the "event" and of the "subject of truth" that provides a framework for understanding revolutionary political commitment.

For Badiou, an "event" is a rupture in the normal situation, a moment in which something genuinely new becomes possible: a possibility that was not available within the terms of the previous situation and that cannot be derived from the normal order of things. Political revolutions, artistic breakthroughs, scientific discoveries, and certain forms of love can all, for Badiou, have the character of events in this sense. The subject who encounters an event is called to a choice: to affirm the event and to remain faithful to the new possibilities it opens up, or to deny the event and return to the safety of the normal situation.

Badiou's framework provides a way of understanding Khan's political commitment to the Liberation War and its legacy. The Liberation War was, on this reading, an event: a moment in which genuine social transformation became possible, in which new forms of collective life and new principles of political organization were being tested and developed. The question of fidelity to this event, of whether subsequent political developments in Bangladesh have remained true to the possibilities opened up in 1971, is the central question of Khan's political analysis. His concept of the "derailed revolution" can be read in Badiouian terms as the story of a failed fidelity: the national bourgeoisie that came to power after independence chose to deny the event rather than remain faithful to it, and the subsequent history of Bangladesh can be understood as the consequences of this denial.

17.3 The Ethics of Translation: Intellectual Responsibility in Cross-Cultural Dialogue

One of the most specifically ethical dimensions of Khan's intellectual practice is what might be called the ethics of translation: the responsibility that comes with importing theoretical frameworks from one cultural context to another. When a Bangladeshi intellectual uses Lacanian concepts to analyze Bangladeshi culture, or when he invokes Fanon's analysis of the Algerian situation to illuminate the Bangladeshi political condition, he is engaged in an act of intellectual translation that raises genuine ethical questions: Is the translation faithful to the original? Does it impose alien categories on a situation that has its own irreducible specificity? Does it serve the interests of those whose situation it purports to illuminate, or does it merely serve the intellectual's desire for theoretical sophistication?

Khan's handling of these questions is not uniformly successful. At his best, his translations are genuinely illuminating: the use of Fanon's concept of the colonized consciousness to analyze the linguistic self-deprecation of the Bengali educated class, for instance, produces genuine insight that is not available from within the framework of Bengali cultural criticism alone. At his less successful moments, the theoretical framework can feel like a grid imposed on the material rather than a lens that reveals its depths, and the Lacanian vocabulary can become a kind of theoretical performance that adds complexity without adding light.

The general principle that Khan seems to be working toward is what we might call a hermeneutic principle of charity combined with critical vigilance: the translated theory is treated charitably, as a genuine attempt to illuminate a real phenomenon, but it is also subjected to critical scrutiny, tested against the specific features of the situation it is applied to, and modified or rejected when it fails to illuminate. This is a reasonable principle, but its application requires the kind of intimate knowledge of both the theoretical tradition and the local situation that is rare and that Khan, at his best, possesses.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: LACANIAN-MARXIST ANALYSIS IN PRACTICE: THREE CASE STUDIES

18.1 Case Study One: The 1971 Liberation War as Revolutionary Event and Its Aftermath

We have already discussed the Liberation War at length in Part One, but here we want to apply the full theoretical apparatus developed in Part Two to analyze it more rigorously. The Liberation War can be analyzed from the Lacanian-Marxist perspective along several dimensions.

At the level of the symbolic order, the Liberation War represented a rupture in the symbolic coordinates that had previously organized Bengali Muslim political identity. Prior to 1971, the dominant symbolic framework was the Pakistani national narrative: Bengali Muslims were Pakistanis first, members of the Muslim nation that had been created by partition from Hindu-majority India. The Liberation War replaced this symbolic framework with a new one: Bengali identity, defined primarily in terms of language and culture rather than religion, became the primary basis of political identity, and the relationship to Pakistan was rearticulated from one of belonging to one of antagonism.

This symbolic rupture was not simply a change of minds; it was a transformation of the entire symbolic order through which political subjectivity was organized. The signifier "Pakistani" went, in the course of nine months of war, from being a term of primary identification to a term of abjection; the signifier "Bengali" went from being a secondary marker of cultural identity to the primary basis of political community. This transformation of the symbolic order is what Khan means when he insists that the Liberation War was not merely a nationalist movement but a genuine revolution: it changed not just who was in power but the symbolic framework through which power was organized and justified.

At the level of the Imaginary, the Liberation War produced a powerful set of images and identifications that continue to organize Bangladeshi national self-understanding: the image of the Mukti Bahini fighter, the image of the martyrs of the Language Movement, the image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivering the "liberation speech" on March 7, 1971, the image of the Pakistani military's surrender at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka. These images function as the imaginary resources through which Bangladeshis sustain their national identity, and they continue to be contested and reinterpreted by different political forces.

At the level of the Real, the Liberation War left a traumatic remainder that resists symbolization: the mass killings, the rapes, the disappearances, the deaths of combatants and civilians. This Real dimension of the war is the element that cannot be fully captured by the nationalist narrative (which tends to glorify the war while eliding its traumatic dimensions) or by the Pakistani narrative (which tends to deny or minimize the atrocities). It is the element that keeps returning, in distorted forms, in the symptomatology of Bangladeshi political life.

18.2 Case Study Two: The Shahbagh Movement of 2013

The Shahbagh Movement of 2013 provides a second case study for the application of Lacanian-Marxist analysis. The movement, which began as a protest by bloggers and activists demanding the death penalty for those convicted of war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunal, rapidly expanded into a mass popular phenomenon, with hundreds of thousands of people gathering in Shahbagh Square in Dhaka over a period of weeks.

From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony, the Shahbagh Movement is a paradigmatic example of the "logic of equivalence" at work. Different social groups (students, secularists, progressive activists, cultural figures, ordinary citizens) with different specific demands were articulated together through their shared opposition to the Islamist politics represented by Jamaat-e-Islami and its collaborators in the 1971 war crimes. The demand for justice for the victims of 1971 became a nodal point around which a broader project of secular-progressive national identity was being constructed.

From the Lacanian perspective, the movement can be analyzed as an attempt to suture the fundamental lack that the unsatisfied demand for justice represents. The victims of the Liberation War had been waiting for over forty years for justice; the trial of the war criminals represented a belated attempt to close this open wound in the national symbolic order. But as Lacan's analysis of demand suggests, the satisfaction of one demand always reveals another beneath it: the demand for the death penalty (when some sentences fell short of this) revealed a deeper demand

for a comprehensive reckoning with the violence of 1971 and its legacy, which in turn revealed a demand for genuine social justice that went far beyond the scope of any criminal tribunal.

The movement's fate illustrates another Lacanian insight: the way in which political movements can be co-opted by appropriating their discourse while changing its direction. The Awami League government, which initially supported the movement, began to distance itself as the movement's secular and anti-Islamist dimensions created political complications (including a counter-movement by Islamist groups that denounced the Shahbagh protesters as atheists). The government's response illustrated how a mass movement organized around a genuinely popular demand can be captured and redirected by political forces with different interests.

Khan's engagement with the Shahbagh Movement, and his subsequent analysis of its fate, demonstrates his ability to hold multiple levels of analysis simultaneously: the symbolic (the demand for justice and its relationship to national identity), the political (the class forces and institutional interests that shaped the movement's development), and the psychic (the specific forms of desire, identification, and *jouissance* that animated both the movement and the reactions against it).

18.3 Case Study Three: Language Policy and Linguistic Desire

The question of language policy, as we have discussed extensively, is central to Khan's intellectual and political project. Here we want to analyze it specifically through the Lacanian-Marxist lens developed in this Part.

At the level of the symbolic order, the preference for English over Bengali in Bangladeshi educated circles reflects the organization of value within the colonial symbolic order. English is the master signifier of prestige and authority in this symbolic order; it occupies the position of what Lacan calls the "Name of the Father," the signifier that organizes the entire field of signification and that confers symbolic authority on those who speak it correctly. Bengali, in this symbolic order, occupies a subordinate position: it is the language of the home, the family, the local community, and the heart, but not the language of serious intellectual work, professional authority, or social distinction.

At the level of the Imaginary, the educated Bangladeshi's identification with English reflects a structure of imaginary misrecognition: seeing oneself through the eyes of the (colonial) Other and finding oneself lacking by comparison. The colonial mirror offers a reflection in which English-speaking competence is the standard of educational achievement and social worth, and the subject who identifies with this mirror image (as educated Bangladeshis systematically do) must position himself in relation to English as the standard of linguistic value.

At the level of the Real, the desire for English reflects something that goes beyond symbolic value and imaginary identification: a form of *jouissance* attached to the colonial language that is not easily reduced to either prestige-seeking or rational calculation. The pleasure that some educated Bangladeshis take in their English-language proficiency, the shame that others feel about their inability to speak English "properly," the intense emotional investment that many families make in English-medium education for their children: all of these suggest that the

relationship to English involves a dimension of drive and jouissance that is not simply ideological in the thin sense.

Khan's analysis at this level is at its most psychoanalytically sophisticated. He argues that the solution to the language problem is not simply a matter of changing policy (making Bengali the medium of instruction) but of transforming the desire and identification structures that make English so psychically attractive. This requires not just institutional change but cultural and psychological work: the construction of forms of Bengali cultural life and intellectual production that are sufficiently rich and prestigious to provide genuine symbolic satisfaction to those who participate in them.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: RECENT THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND KHAN'S ONGOING RELEVANCE

19.1 Accelerationism, Decolonial Theory, and New Materialisms

The early twenty-first century has seen the emergence of several new theoretical movements that engage with (and sometimes against) the Lacanian-Marxist tradition, and situating Khan's work in relation to these new developments helps to clarify both its continuing relevance and its limitations.

Accelerationism, associated with thinkers like Nick Land, Alex Williams, and Nick Srnicek, represents a provocative response to the apparent impasse of left politics: rather than resisting the development of capitalism and technology, accelerationists argue that the contradictions of capitalism should be intensified until they produce a rupture. Left accelerationists (Williams and Srnicek) argue that socialist politics should embrace technological development and platform organization rather than retreating to anti-capitalist localism. This position has little sympathy for the kind of cultural politics of language and identity that Khan practices, and the encounter between accelerationism and Lacanian-Marxist cultural theory is not productive.

More relevant to Khan's project is the decolonial theory associated with figures like Walter D. Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and the "modernity/coloniality" group. Decolonial theory argues that the "coloniality of power" (Quijano's term for the specific forms of social classification, knowledge production, and subject formation that colonialism established) continues to operate in postcolonial societies, shaping their social hierarchies, their epistemic frameworks, and their political formations. This argument is close to Khan's own analysis of the colonial legacy in Bangladesh, and the decolonial framework provides resources for extending and deepening his analysis.

Where decolonial theory diverges from Khan's Lacanian Marxism is in its more radical rejection of European theoretical frameworks: decolonial theorists like Mignolo argue that the project of decoloniality requires developing genuinely indigenous epistemologies rather than simply using European tools against European dominance. Khan's commitment to Lacanian and Marxist theory places him at some distance from this more radical position, and the question of whether

the Lacanian-Marxist framework can be genuinely decolonized or whether it simply reproduces European theoretical dominance in more sophisticated forms is one that Khan's work raises but does not fully resolve.

19.2 Feminist Challenges and Gender in Khan's Analysis

One of the most important dimensions in which Khan's Lacanian-Marxist synthesis has been challenged by subsequent theoretical developments is the dimension of gender. Feminist critics of Lacan, from Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous in the 1970s through Judith Butler and beyond, have argued that the Lacanian theory of the subject is organized around a masculine norm: that the "universal" subject of Lacanian theory is implicitly male, and that the feminine is systematically positioned as lack, as the site of the Real that resists symbolization, or as the passive complement to masculine subjectivity.

Butler's critique of the "heterosexual matrix" that underlies much of psychoanalytic theory, and her argument that gender is not a pre-given biological fact but a performative accomplishment that is continuously (and precariously) reproduced through repeated social practice, represents a significant challenge to the Lacanian framework. If gender is performative rather than structural, then the Lacanian account of the subject's entry into the symbolic order through the paternal function may be a description of one specific historical configuration of subject formation rather than a universal account of how subjectivity works.

Khan's engagement with gender questions is, it must be acknowledged, one of the less developed dimensions of his intellectual project. While he is clearly committed to gender equality as a political value, and while he has written about women's rights and the rights of minorities in the context of his analysis of communalism and social justice, his theoretical framework does not fully incorporate the feminist critique of Lacanian theory. His analysis of the gendered dimensions of colonial and postcolonial power, of the specific forms of violence and exploitation that women face in Bangladeshi society, and of the relationship between gender and class in the political economy of Bangladesh remains underdeveloped relative to the sophistication of his other analyses.

This is a genuine limitation of his work, and it is one that students and scholars building on his foundation should seek to address. The integration of feminist theory, and specifically of the feminist critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis, with the broader Lacanian-Marxist framework is a task that remains to be accomplished, and it is one that is particularly urgent in the Bangladeshi context, where the garment industry's predominantly female workforce, the specific forms of violence against women in the context of communal and political conflict, and the gender dimensions of language and educational inequality are all matters of great importance.

19.3 The Digital Turn: Social Media, Algorithmic Governance, and Political Desire

The contemporary moment presents new theoretical challenges that Khan's framework must be extended to address: the rise of social media as the primary medium of political communication, the development of algorithmic governance and data capitalism, and the transformation of public discourse by digital technology.

Khan's analysis of language, desire, and political discourse was developed primarily in relation to print media and television, the dominant media of communication in Bangladesh during the period of his most active intellectual formation. The emergence of social media (Facebook has an enormous and politically significant presence in Bangladesh) as the primary medium of political communication raises new questions about how desire, identification, and jouissance operate in digital networks.

The political significance of Facebook in Bangladesh was dramatically demonstrated by the role of social media in organizing the July 2024 uprising: young people used Facebook and other platforms to organize protests, share information about government violence, and sustain the political energy of the movement over a period of weeks. The government's attempts to shut down internet access during the most intense phase of the uprising demonstrated both the political power of digital communication and the state's awareness of that power.

Lacanian-Marxist analysis provides some tools for analyzing digital media: the concept of the mirror stage (and its echo in the dynamics of online self-presentation and social validation), the concept of jouissance (and its relationship to the addictive dimensions of social media use), the concept of the Other (and its relationship to the algorithmic "recommender systems" that shape what users see). But these tools require significant extension and modification to address the specific features of digital media, and this is a theoretical task that Khan's framework opens up without fully completing.

19.4 Psychopolitics and the Transformation of Power

The Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han has developed a concept of "psychopolitics" that is relevant to Khan's analytical project, even though Han does not work within the Lacanian-Marxist tradition. Han argues that contemporary neoliberal capitalism has transformed the mechanisms of power: where traditional disciplinary power (analyzed by Foucault) operated through external constraint and prohibition, contemporary psychopolitical power operates through internal motivation and self-optimization. The subject of contemporary capitalism is not simply coerced into compliance; it is seduced into voluntary self-exploitation through the promise of self-realization, entrepreneurship, and the satisfaction of its desires.

This analysis of psychopolitical power has direct relevance to the Bangladeshi context that Khan analyzes. The microfinance model, the NGO development apparatus, the discourse of entrepreneurship and individual empowerment: all of these can be read, through Han's lens, as forms of psychopolitical power that mobilize the self-directed energy of the poor in the service of capital accumulation rather than genuine emancipation. The micro-entrepreneur who takes a Grameen Bank loan and works fourteen hours a day in her small business is not simply being exploited from outside; she is being mobilized to self-exploit through the discourse of empowerment and self-reliance.

Khan's Lacanian-Marxist framework is potentially well suited to developing this analysis, since the Lacanian concept of jouissance provides the psychic mechanism that Han's more phenomenological account of "burnout" and "self-exploitation" gestures toward. Extending Khan's analysis to incorporate these contemporary forms of psychopolitical power would

represent a significant contribution to both the Lacanian-Marxist tradition and to the analysis of contemporary Bangladesh.

CHAPTER TWENTY: TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE LACANIAN-MARXIST SYNTHESIS

20.1 What the Synthesis Achieves

Having examined the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis in philosophical depth across the previous chapters of Part Two, we are now in a position to offer a comprehensive assessment of what this synthesis achieves and where its limits lie.

The synthesis achieves, first, a genuine expansion of the scope of critical analysis. By combining Marx's analysis of material conditions and class relations with Lacan's analysis of subjective desire and symbolic structure, the synthesis is able to analyze social phenomena across multiple levels simultaneously: the economic level (what material conditions produce and maintain), the ideological level (what beliefs and representations those conditions generate and require), and the psychic level (what forms of desire, identification, and jouissance sustain those ideological formations). This multi-level analysis is more adequate to the complexity of social reality than any single-level account.

Second, the synthesis provides a more sophisticated account of political motivation than either tradition can offer alone. Marx's analysis of class interest is a powerful explanatory tool, but it tends to flatten the complexity of political motivation by reducing it to economic interest. Lacan's analysis of desire, identification, and jouissance supplements this economic account with an analysis of the psychic forces that sustain political affiliations and that make political behavior sometimes appear irrational from the standpoint of narrow economic interest. The Lacanian-Marxist synthesis can explain why workers sometimes vote against their economic interests (because their political identification involves jouissance that is not reducible to economic calculation) without abandoning the Marxist insight that class position systematically shapes political consciousness.

Third, the synthesis is genuinely productive in the analysis of culture and ideology. The combination of materialist analysis (which situates cultural production within specific social relations) and psychoanalytic analysis (which attends to the desiring, fantasizing, and identifying dimensions of cultural reception) produces a richer cultural criticism than either approach generates in isolation. Khan's analyses of specific cultural texts and figures, from Baudelaire to Lalon Shah to Bangladeshi cinema, demonstrate the productivity of this combined approach.

20.2 The Limits of the Synthesis

The limits of the synthesis are equally significant. The first limit is epistemological: the synthesis combines a theoretical framework (Lacanian psychoanalysis) that is not empirically testable in any straightforward sense with a framework (Marxist political economy) that does make

empirical claims about social structure and historical development. The combination is productive heuristically but creates genuine problems of validation: how do we assess whether a Lacanian-Marxist analysis of a specific social phenomenon is correct?

Khan's response to this problem, as we have noted, is pragmatic: the test is whether the analysis illuminates the phenomenon and provides insights that other approaches miss. This is a reasonable response, but it does not fully satisfy the demand for epistemic accountability, and it creates the risk that the theoretical framework functions as an irrefutable interpretive grid that can be applied to any phenomenon to generate apparently plausible but ultimately unfalsifiable claims.

The second limit is political: the synthesis, for all its sophistication, does not resolve the fundamental tension between analysis and agency. It provides powerful tools for analyzing how social subjects are constituted by structural conditions and how those conditions maintain their hold through ideological and psychic mechanisms. But it is less powerful in providing a positive account of how subjects can act effectively to transform those conditions. The Lacanian insight that every political project organized around the promise of completeness and full *jouissance* is likely to reproduce the very conditions it seeks to overcome is a powerful critical tool, but it can also generate a kind of political paralysis: if every revolutionary project is doomed to reproduce domination, why bother?

Khan's response to this political paralysis is to maintain what Badiou calls fidelity to the event: to remain committed to the transformative possibilities opened by the Liberation War while being clear-eyed about the ways in which those possibilities have been foreclosed. This is an admirable intellectual and political stance, but it requires a level of sustained tension between hope and critique that is difficult to maintain and that not everyone will find compelling.

20.3 Khan's Specific Contribution to the Tradition

Within the broader tradition of Lacanian-Marxist theory, Khan's specific contribution is the sustained application of the synthesis to the specific conditions of a postcolonial South Asian society. Where Althusser, Žižek, and Laclau have primarily worked on European and Latin American contexts, and where Fanon worked primarily on the African and Algerian situations, Khan brings the full theoretical apparatus to bear on Bangladesh, a country with its own distinctive historical trajectory, its own linguistic and cultural traditions, and its own specific postcolonial dilemmas.

This specificity is both Khan's most important contribution and his greatest challenge. The most productive parts of his work are those where the theoretical framework genuinely illuminates the specific Bangladeshi situation, where the Lacanian-Marxist concepts allow us to see something about Bengali culture and Bangladeshi politics that we could not see without them. The least productive parts are those where the theoretical framework feels like an external imposition, where the concepts are applied mechanically rather than creatively, and where the specificity of the situation is sacrificed to theoretical consistency.

The challenge for those who build on Khan's work is to maintain the balance that his best work achieves: to bring theoretical sophistication to bear on specific cultural and political situations in ways that genuinely illuminate those situations rather than simply demonstrating theoretical competence. This requires the kind of intimate knowledge of the local situation that only long immersion can provide, combined with the kind of theoretical range that only sustained engagement with the intellectual traditions can produce. Khan's career, spanning nearly four decades of teaching, writing, and public engagement, demonstrates both what this combination can achieve and how difficult it is to sustain.

CONCLUSION TO PART TWO

Part Two has undertaken a deep philosophical examination of the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis that organizes Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We have examined the philosophical foundations of both Lacan's theory of the subject and Marx's materialist analysis of social structure and historical development. We have traced the major moments in the history of the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, from Althusser through Laclau and Mouffe to Žižek, situating Khan's contribution within this broader tradition. We have applied the full theoretical apparatus to three specific case studies: the Liberation War and its aftermath, the Shahbagh Movement, and the politics of language. And we have assessed both the achievements and the limitations of the synthesis.

The overall assessment is that the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, as Khan practices it, is a genuinely productive analytical framework that has made significant contributions to the understanding of Bangladeshi culture, politics, and intellectual life. It is not philosophically perfect, and it raises genuine questions of epistemology, gender, and political agency that require ongoing engagement. But it represents a serious, sustained, and often illuminating attempt to bring the tools of critical theory to bear on a specific postcolonial situation, and this attempt is valuable both for what it achieves and for the questions it raises that remain to be answered.

Part Three of this textbook will turn to the economic dimensions of Khan's thought, examining in depth his doctoral research on central banking and situating it within his broader analysis of the political economy of Bangladesh, colonialism, and global capitalism.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART TWO

Key Philosophical Debates Referenced

The Structuralism Controversy (1966-1972): The debate in French intellectual life about whether structuralism (with its emphasis on synchronic systems and the decentering of the subject) represented a genuine scientific advance or a form of theoretical idealism. Key figures: Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault. Relevant to understanding the philosophical context of the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis.

The Humanism Debate in Marxism: The debate between "humanist" Marxism (emphasizing the early Marx's concepts of alienation and human essence, associated with figures like Erich Fromm and the early Frankfurt School) and "scientific" or "structural" Marxism (emphasizing the mature Marx's analysis of structure and social relations, associated with Althusser). Relevant to understanding the different versions of the Marxist framework available to Khan.

The Discourse Theory Debate: The debate about the relative merits of the "discourse theory" of Laclau and Mouffe, the "cultural materialism" of Raymond Williams, and the "critical realism" of Roy Bhaskar as frameworks for understanding the relationship between material conditions and cultural/political formations. Relevant to assessing Khan's specific theoretical choices.

Extended Discussion Questions

1. Althusser argues that ideology "interpellates" subjects, calling them into being through a process of recognition. Khan uses this framework to analyze how Bengali Muslims are interpellated by various ideological discourses (Pakistani nationalism, Bengali nationalism, secular humanism, Islamic political identity). Can you trace a specific example of interpellation in the Bangladeshi context, analyzing how a specific discourse hails subjects and what kind of subject position it offers?
2. Laclau and Mouffe argue that political identities are not pre-given by social positions but are constituted through the practice of hegemony, through the articulation of different demands and identities into a broader political project. How does this framework help us understand the construction of "Bangladeshi identity" through the Liberation War? What demands and identities were articulated together, and how was the hegemonic project constructed?
3. Khan distinguishes between the Bangladeshi ruling class's stated commitment to Bengali and its actual practice of preferring English, characterizing this split as a form of the "pervert structure" in Lacan's sense. Is this characterization convincing? Does the Lacanian concept of perversion add analytical value beyond what a straightforward analysis of class interest and hypocrisy would provide?
4. Byung-Chul Han's concept of "psychopolitics" describes contemporary forms of power that operate through internal motivation and self-optimization rather than external constraint. How might this concept be applied to the political economy of Bangladesh, particularly in relation to the microfinance model and the NGO sector? Where does it converge with and diverge from Khan's own analysis?
5. The feminist critique of Lacanian theory argues that the Lacanian subject is implicitly gendered masculine and that the feminine is systematically positioned as lack or as the site of the Real. How significant is this critique for Khan's application of Lacanian theory to the Bangladeshi context? What would a feminist-inflected Lacanian-Marxist analysis of gender in Bangladesh look like?

End of Part Two

Part Three: Political Economy in Depth: From Central Banking to the Postcolonial Economy will follow.

PART THREE: POLITICAL ECONOMY IN DEPTH

From Central Banking to the Postcolonial Economy: Value, Labor, Capital, and the Structures of Dependency

PREFACE TO PART THREE

Parts One and Two of this textbook established the biographical, historical, and philosophical foundations of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We traced his life and formation, introduced the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis that serves as his primary theoretical apparatus, and examined the philosophical depth and tensions of that synthesis. Part Three turns to a dimension of his work that is sometimes underemphasized by those who focus exclusively on his cultural and political criticism: the political economy that provides the material foundation for everything else he does.

Khan is, in an important sense, an economist who became a cultural theorist and public intellectual. His doctoral dissertation on the history of central banking in nineteenth-century England is not an aberration or a youthful detour; it is a foundational text that reveals the economic substrata of his subsequent intellectual development. His engagement with questions of monetary theory, the history of financial institutions, the relationship between the state and capital, and the global dynamics of value extraction shapes his analysis of culture, politics, and psychic life in ways that are not always immediately visible but that are pervasive once one learns to look for them.

This Part proceeds in three broad movements. The first examines Khan's doctoral research in depth, situating it within the history of monetary theory and assessing its implications for his broader analytical framework. The second examines his political economy of Bangladesh, addressing questions of labor, value, class formation, and dependency in the context of the country's specific historical and structural conditions. The third examines his engagement with broader questions of global political economy: imperialism, financialization, the crisis of neoliberalism, and the prospects for alternative economic arrangements.

Throughout, we will be attentive to the ways in which Khan's economic analysis connects to his philosophical, cultural, and political work, showing how the political economy provides the material grounding for his analysis of ideology, subjectivity, and political struggle.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: MONEY, CREDIT, AND THE STATE: REVISITING THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

21.1 The Question That Drives the Dissertation

Khan's doctoral dissertation, *Theories of Central Banking in England, 1793 to 1877*, is organized around a question that turns out to be far more complex than its apparently technical character suggests: what is money? This is a question that has exercised economists, philosophers, and political theorists since antiquity, and it remains fiercely contested today. The specific historical period that Khan studies is one in which the question was posed with particular urgency, because the development of the capitalist credit system was creating new forms of money (bank notes, bills of exchange, book credits) that did not fit neatly into existing theoretical frameworks, and because the consequences of getting the answer wrong were becoming increasingly visible in the financial crises that periodically shook the British economy in the nineteenth century.

The question of what money is connects immediately to a set of political questions: who should control the supply of money, according to what principles, in whose interests, and through what institutional mechanisms? These are not technical questions to which there are value-neutral answers; they are fundamentally political questions about the distribution of power and resources in a capitalist economy. Understanding this political dimension of monetary theory is central to understanding both the historical debates that Khan analyzes and the contemporary relevance of his research.

To appreciate what Khan is doing in his dissertation, and why it matters for his subsequent intellectual development, we need to understand three things: the historical context of monetary theory in nineteenth-century England, the major competing theories that Khan analyzes, and the broader Marxist framework within which he situates his historical analysis.

21.2 Gold, Paper, and the Problem of Value

The monetary system of nineteenth-century England operated on the basis of a relationship between metallic money (gold and silver coins) and various forms of credit money (bank notes, bills of exchange, and other instruments). The dominant theoretical framework for understanding this system was the quantity theory of money, associated in its classical form with David Hume and later with Ricardo: the theory that the value of money (and therefore the price level) is determined by the quantity of money in circulation, so that an increase in the money supply leads to a proportional increase in prices and a decrease in the value of money.

This theoretical framework generated a specific set of policy prescriptions: if the money supply determines the price level, then monetary stability requires strict control of the money supply, and the mechanism for this control was the gold standard, which tied the issue of paper money to the gold reserve. The Currency School, which dominated monetary policy in the first half of the nineteenth century and which achieved its institutional expression in the Bank Charter Act of 1844, was the political expression of this theoretical framework.

But the quantity theory and the Currency School position faced serious theoretical and empirical challenges from the Banking School, which argued that the causation ran in the opposite direction: not from money supply to prices, but from economic activity to the demand for credit, which then determined the amount of credit money in circulation. On this view, the money supply was not an independent variable that the monetary authorities could control; it was an endogenous variable determined by the needs of the economy.

This debate between exogenous and endogenous theories of money is not merely of historical interest; it is the central fault line in contemporary monetary economics, and it has become newly urgent in the context of debates about quantitative easing, central bank independence, and the proper response to the global financial crises of 2008 and after. Khan's historical analysis of this debate thus connects directly to the most pressing questions of contemporary macroeconomic policy.

21.3 The Bullionist Controversy: Inflation, Suspension, and Theoretical Innovation

The specific episode that opens Khan's historical analysis is the Bullionist Controversy of the early nineteenth century, triggered by the suspension of gold payments by the Bank of England in 1797 during the Napoleonic Wars. When the Bank suspended convertibility (the obligation to exchange its notes for gold on demand), it freed itself from the constraint of the gold standard and was able to expand its note issue to finance the government's war expenditures. The result was a period of significant inflation, and the Bullionist Controversy was the debate about the causes and proper cure of this inflation.

The Bullionists, led by figures like David Ricardo and Walter Boyd, argued that the inflation was caused by the excess issue of Bank of England notes during the suspension period, and that the cure was simple: return to gold convertibility, which would automatically limit the note issue and restore price stability. The Anti-Bullionists, defending the Bank of England's policy, argued that the inflation was caused by factors external to the monetary system (bad harvests, the disruption of trade by the war) and that the Bank's note issue had been perfectly appropriate to the needs of the economy.

This debate produced one of the most important innovations in monetary theory: the distinction between the currency (notes and coin in circulation) and credit more broadly. The Bullionists tended to focus on the note issue as the key variable; their critics pointed out that notes were only one form of credit, and that controlling the note issue while leaving other forms of credit free to expand might not achieve the desired monetary stability. This insight would be developed further by the Banking School theorists whom Khan analyzes in detail.

For Khan, the Bullionist Controversy illustrates a broader methodological principle: that monetary crises generate theoretical innovation. When the existing theoretical framework fails to account for actual economic developments (as the quantity theory failed to account for the specific patterns of inflation during the Napoleonic Wars), new theoretical frameworks must be developed. And these new frameworks are never purely intellectual achievements; they are developed in the context of specific political conflicts about monetary policy, and they reflect the interests and perspectives of specific social classes and institutional actors.

21.4 Thomas Tooke and the Banking School: A Close Reading

Thomas Tooke (1774-1858) is one of the central figures in Khan's dissertation, and his work represents the most sophisticated development of the Banking School position in the nineteenth century. Tooke was a merchant with direct experience of financial markets, and his major theoretical work, the multi-volume *History of Prices and the State of Circulation* (1838-1857), combined empirical analysis of price movements over several decades with theoretical arguments about the relationship between credit, money, and economic activity.

Tooke's central theoretical argument was what has come to be called the "Banking Principle" or the "reflux principle": the claim that notes issued by banks to meet the legitimate credit needs of the commercial community will automatically return to the issuing bank when those needs are satisfied, and therefore that the banking system cannot maintain a permanent excess of notes in circulation. This principle implied that the Currency School's fear of excess note issue was misplaced: the banking system would naturally regulate itself according to the demands of commerce, without need for external legislative restriction.

Khan's reading of Tooke is philosophically as well as historically sophisticated. He situates Tooke's Banking Principle within a broader theoretical framework that anticipates some of the key insights of twentieth-century monetary economics, including the endogenous money theory of post-Keynesian economists like Basil Moore, Hyman Minsky, and Marc Lavoie. The Banking School's insight that money supply responds to demand rather than determining it is, in Khan's analysis, not simply a theoretical claim about the mechanics of banking; it is a political claim about the proper relationship between the state and the credit system, and it has implications for questions of monetary policy that are as relevant today as they were in Tooke's time.

Khan also reads Tooke through a Marxist lens, connecting his analysis of credit to Marx's own analysis in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* of the relationship between money, credit, and capital accumulation. Marx had a complex relationship to the Currency School-Banking School debate: he was critical of both positions as incomplete, but he found more to build on in the Banking School's analysis than in the Currency School's rigid quantity-theoretic framework. Understanding Khan's reading of Tooke helps to illuminate the connection between his historical economic research and the Marxist theoretical framework within which he situates it.

21.5 The Bank Charter Act of 1844 and Its Consequences

The Bank Charter Act of 1844, known as Peel's Act after the Prime Minister who introduced it, was the legislative embodiment of the Currency School's victory in the theoretical and political debates of the 1830s and early 1840s. The Act divided the Bank of England into two departments (the Banking Department, which conducted ordinary banking business, and the Issue Department, which had the exclusive authority to issue notes), and it required that all note issues beyond a fixed limit (14 million pounds, representing the existing note issue backed by government securities) be backed pound for pound by gold or silver bullion. This effectively created an automatic mechanism for regulating the note issue: as gold flowed in or out of the Bank, the note issue would automatically expand or contract by a corresponding amount.

The practical consequences of this institutional arrangement were not what the Currency School had predicted. The Act was suspended in 1847, 1857, and 1866, on each occasion in response to a financial crisis in which the Bank's inability to expand its note issue under the Act's restrictions threatened to turn a financial panic into a generalized economic catastrophe. The need to suspend the Act in each of these crises demonstrated, in Khan's analysis, the fundamental flaw in the Currency School's theoretical framework: the assumption that controlling the note issue was sufficient to ensure monetary stability, when in fact the financial system had developed a range of credit instruments (including bank deposits and bills of exchange) that were functionally equivalent to notes but outside the scope of the Act's restrictions.

Khan's analysis of the 1844 Act and its consequences draws on the Marxist concept of the contradiction between the form and the content of social relations. The Act attempted to regulate the form of money (the note issue) while leaving its content (the broader credit system) free to develop according to its own logic. The contradiction between the rigid form (fixed rules for note issue) and the dynamic content (a credit system responding to the needs of accumulation) generated the periodic crises that required the Act's suspension. This analysis has direct implications for contemporary debates about banking regulation, where similar tensions between regulatory form and financial content have produced analogous crises.

21.6 Marx on Money and Credit: The Theoretical Foundation

To fully understand Khan's dissertation, it is necessary to engage with Marx's own analysis of money and credit, which provides the theoretical framework within which Khan situates his historical research. Marx's analysis of money is scattered across several major works (*Capital* Volume One, *Capital* Volume Three, the *Grundrisse*, and the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*), and bringing them together into a coherent account requires careful interpretive work that Khan's training under Duncan Foley equipped him to undertake.

For Marx, money is not simply a neutral medium of exchange; it is a specific social form that arises from the contradictions of the commodity economy and that serves to mediate the exchange of commodities while concealing the social relations of production that give those commodities their value. Money performs several distinct functions: it is a measure of value (expressing the value of commodities in monetary terms), a medium of circulation (facilitating the exchange of commodities), a means of payment (settling debts and obligations), a store of value (allowing the hoarding and accumulation of wealth), and world money (serving as the universal equivalent in international trade).

The development of the credit system is, in Marx's analysis, an extension of the money form: credit allows the separation of purchase and payment in time (I can buy now and pay later), and this temporal separation is the basis of the entire credit system, from simple trade credit to the most complex instruments of financial capitalism. The credit system performs a dual function in Marx's analysis: it is a mechanism for centralizing and allocating capital more efficiently than the gold standard allows (enabling the rapid mobilization of capital for investment on a scale that would be impossible with purely metallic money), but it is also a mechanism that systematically amplifies the contradictions of the capitalist economy, turning the periodic crises of overproduction into financial crises that can threaten the stability of the entire system.

Khan's doctoral research engages with these Marxist categories in the specific context of the nineteenth-century English banking debates, showing how the theoretical controversies of that period can be illuminated by Marx's framework and vice versa: how the historical material of the Currency School-Banking School debate helps to concretize and refine the more abstract categories of Marx's monetary theory.

21.7 Duncan Foley's Contribution: The New Interpretation

A central element of the intellectual context of Khan's dissertation is Duncan Foley's "new interpretation" of Marx's labor theory of value, developed in collaboration with Gerard Dumenil in the 1980s. This interpretation, which has been enormously influential in the heterodox economics tradition, offers a way of reconciling Marx's theoretical claims about value and exploitation with the observable phenomena of prices and profit rates in actual capitalist economies.

The central problem that Foley and Dumenil addressed was the so-called "transformation problem": the difficulty of explaining how the values of commodities (determined, according to Marx, by the socially necessary labor time required to produce them) are transformed into the prices at which those commodities actually sell on the market. The "standard" reading of Marx's transformation procedure (presented in Volume Three of *Capital*) produces inconsistencies when worked out mathematically, and these inconsistencies had been used by critics to argue that the labor theory of value was fundamentally flawed.

Foley and Dumenil's "new interpretation" resolved this problem by redefining the relationship between values and prices: rather than attempting to transform individual commodity values into prices, they defined the "monetary expression of labor time" (the amount of money that represents one hour of social labor) as the key link between the value and price systems. On this interpretation, the total value created in the economy (measured in labor hours) is equivalent to the total net product measured in monetary terms (divided by the monetary expression of labor time), and the rate of exploitation is measured by the ratio of surplus value to variable capital, both measured in monetary terms.

This may seem like an abstract technical point, but it has significant implications for the analysis of political economy that Khan undertakes. It provides a rigorous foundation for the claim that exploitation is a systematic feature of capitalist economies, not a contingent outcome that depends on the particular power relations in specific markets. And it connects the abstract categories of value theory to the observable magnitudes of money and price in ways that make the theory empirically applicable. Khan's training in this framework shaped his understanding of the relationship between theoretical categories and observable economic phenomena, and this understanding informs his subsequent analysis of the Bangladeshi economy and its position within the global capitalist system.

21.8 From Historical Research to Contemporary Analysis: The Enduring Relevance

The debates that Khan analyzed in his dissertation about the nature of money, the proper role of central banks, the relationship between the money supply and economic activity, and the

institutional design of monetary systems have not been resolved; they have merely changed form. The contemporary debates about central bank independence, quantitative easing, cryptocurrency, and the proper response to financial crises are the twenty-first-century iterations of the same fundamental questions.

The 2008 global financial crisis demonstrated, in particularly dramatic fashion, the continuing relevance of the theoretical issues Khan studied. The crisis was, in many ways, a vindication of the Banking School's insights: the financial system had developed a vast array of credit instruments (mortgage-backed securities, collateralized debt obligations, credit default swaps) that were functionally equivalent to money in their economic effects but that were outside the regulatory perimeter of the central banking system. When the value of these instruments collapsed, the result was a financial crisis whose dynamics bore a striking resemblance to the crises that had required the suspension of the Bank Charter Act in the nineteenth century.

The policy responses to the 2008 crisis, including the Federal Reserve's massive expansion of its balance sheet through quantitative easing, the Bank of England's similar programs, and the debates about "unconventional monetary policy" that followed, are in important ways debates about the same fundamental questions that the Banking School and Currency School debated in the nineteenth century: What is money? Who should control its supply? According to what principles? In whose interests?

Khan has engaged with these contemporary debates in his public commentary, connecting his historical research to the analysis of contemporary global financial dynamics. His analysis of the colonial dimensions of international monetary arrangements, in particular his examination of how the international monetary system (organized around the dollar as world currency since the Bretton Woods agreements of 1944) reproduces in new forms the kind of asymmetric power relations that characterized the gold standard era, is one of the most distinctive contributions his historical training enables him to make.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COLONIALISM IN BENGAL

22.1 Primitive Accumulation and Colonial Dispossession

Marx's concept of "primitive accumulation," developed in the later chapters of Capital Volume One, describes the historical processes through which the conditions for capitalist production were established: the separation of producers from their means of production, the creation of a propertyless working class with no alternative but to sell its labor power, and the concentration of the means of production in the hands of a capitalist class. In England, this process involved the enclosure of common lands, the dissolution of the monasteries, and various other forms of dispossession that drove the rural peasantry off the land and into the cities as free but propertyless wage laborers.

In the colonial context, primitive accumulation took forms that were often more violent and more direct than the English case. The colonial expropriation of land, the destruction of existing artisanal industries, the imposition of forms of forced or semi-forced labor, and the systematic transfer of wealth from colony to metropolis: all of these are aspects of what later theorists, building on Marx, have called "colonial primitive accumulation" or, in Rosa Luxemburg's formulation, the "accumulation of capital" through the ongoing incorporation of non-capitalist social formations.

In Bengal, the most significant episode of colonial primitive accumulation was the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which Khan analyzed briefly in Part One. Here we can examine it in greater depth. The Permanent Settlement, introduced by the Governor-General Lord Cornwallis, permanently fixed the land revenue payments that Bengal's landlords (zamindars) owed to the colonial state, and permanently assigned to those landlords heritable, saleable, and mortgageable property rights over the land. The consequences were threefold.

First, it created a class of landlords with no incentive to improve agricultural productivity (since their revenue obligations were permanently fixed regardless of any increase in the land's productivity) but with strong incentives to maximize the extraction of rent from their tenants. Second, it dispossessed the actual cultivators of any secure rights in the land they tilled: they became tenants-at-will, subject to eviction and rent enhancement at the landlord's discretion. Third, it generated a fiscal surplus for the colonial state that could be used to finance the expansion of British power throughout the subcontinent.

The Permanent Settlement thus established the basic structure of agrarian class relations in Bengal that would persist through the colonial period and shape the subsequent development of capitalist agriculture: a class of large landowners extracting rent from a class of tenant cultivators, with a layer of sub-landlords and rent collectors between them, and with the actual cultivators in a condition of chronic debt and insecurity that made genuine agricultural development impossible.

22.2 The Deindustrialization of Bengal: Textiles and the Colonial Division of Labor

Alongside the transformation of agrarian relations, the colonial period saw the destruction of Bengal's traditional textile industry, which had been one of the most sophisticated in the world. Bengali muslin and other textiles had been major exports throughout the pre-colonial period, reaching markets from the Middle East to Southeast Asia to Europe. The quality of Bengali textiles was legendary: the finest muslin (known as "woven air" for its transparency) was prized as a luxury commodity throughout the trading world.

The British East India Company's policies systematically undermined this industry. In the early colonial period, the Company forced weavers to sell their products at below-market prices through a system of "dadni" (advance) contracts, effectively turning independent artisans into company workers without the security of employment. As the industrial revolution in England developed a machine-based textile industry capable of producing cloth at dramatically lower cost than hand-loom weavers, the colonial state used its power to ensure that the Indian market was

open to British manufactured textiles (even as British markets remained protected from Indian competition), and the result was the destruction of the artisanal textile industry of Bengal.

This episode of deindustrialization has been extensively documented by economic historians including Prasannan Parthasarathi, who has shown that the standard account of Indian economic "backwardness" as a pre-colonial condition is deeply misleading: Bengal in the eighteenth century was not a technologically backward region that was simply being brought into contact with superior British industrial techniques; it was an economically sophisticated region that was forcibly deindustrialized in order to create a market for British manufactured goods. This historical revision of the standard narrative has direct implications for Khan's analysis of development and underdevelopment in Bangladesh: the "underdevelopment" of Bangladesh is not an original condition but a historically produced one, created through specific colonial policies.

22.3 The Drain of Wealth: From Dadabhai Naoroji to Contemporary Debates

One of the most important concepts in the political economy of British colonialism in India is what nineteenth-century Indian nationalist economist Dadabhai Naoroji called "the drain of wealth": the systematic transfer of economic surplus from India to Britain through the mechanisms of colonial governance and trade. Naoroji calculated, in his influential work *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901), that a massive annual sum was being transferred from India to Britain through a combination of "home charges" (payments to the British government for the costs of colonial administration and the Indian Army), profit remittances by British businesses in India, and the structural terms of trade that ensured that India exported primary commodities at low prices while importing manufactured goods at high prices.

This argument was further developed by twentieth-century economists, including the Marxist economic historian R. Palme Dutt (whose *India Today*, 1940, is a classic of anti-colonial political economy) and, more recently, by economists like Utsa Patnaik, who has calculated that the total value of wealth transferred from India to Britain during the colonial period was on the order of 45 trillion dollars at 2016 prices. While these estimates are contested, the basic phenomenon is well documented: the colonial period involved a systematic net transfer of economic resources from India (and Bengal in particular) to Britain, and this transfer was a significant factor in financing the industrial revolution and in creating the conditions for British economic dominance.

Khan situates the political economy of Bangladesh within this longer history of wealth extraction and dependency. The specific numbers may be debated, but the structural point is not: Bangladesh's current economic underdevelopment is not the result of internal failures of culture, governance, or human capital; it is the result of a century and a half of colonial extraction that transferred the surplus created by Bengali labor to the metropolitan center, preventing the accumulation of the capital that would have been required for endogenous industrial development.

22.4 Jute and the Monoculture Economy

The specific commodity around which the political economy of colonial Bengal was organized was jute, a fibrous plant cultivated throughout the Bengal delta and used to manufacture sacking, rope, and other products that were in enormous demand in the industrializing world for packaging agricultural and industrial goods. Bengal was, for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the world's primary supplier of raw jute, and the jute trade was the cornerstone of the colonial export economy of the region.

The jute economy exemplifies the dependency structure of the colonial economy in a particularly clear way. Bengal grew the raw jute; the jute was processed in mills concentrated in Dundee, Scotland, where it was manufactured into jute cloth, sacking, and rope. The Dundee mills were owned by British capital; the labor was performed by workers in Dundee, using machinery designed and built in Britain. The profit from the entire value chain accumulated in Britain; the actual cultivators of jute in Bengal received prices that were determined by the global commodity markets and that left them in a condition of chronic vulnerability to price fluctuations.

There were, to be sure, also jute mills established in Calcutta (in what is now West Bengal) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but these mills were also primarily owned by British capital (with some Indian and Marwari participation), and the profits they generated were largely repatriated to Britain or retained by the metropolitan-connected capitalist class rather than being invested in the broader development of the Bengali economy.

The legacy of the jute monoculture is still visible in the structure of the Bangladeshi economy today, though jute has been replaced as the primary export commodity by garments. The monoculture pattern, in which a single labor-intensive export industry dominates the economy while the domestic market remains underdeveloped and diversification is limited, is a structural feature of the colonial economy that has been reproduced in the postcolonial period through new mechanisms.

22.5 Partition 1947 and Economic Dislocation

The Partition of 1947 had profound economic consequences for what is now Bangladesh. The partition divided Bengal along communal lines, separating the jute-growing areas (primarily in East Bengal, now Bangladesh) from the jute-processing mills (primarily in West Bengal, including Calcutta). This geographical separation created an immediate economic crisis: the major source of raw material was now in a different country from the mills that processed it, and the trading networks and commercial relationships that had connected producers and processors were disrupted or destroyed.

The Partition also produced massive population displacement, with large numbers of Hindus fleeing from East Bengal to West Bengal and large numbers of Muslims moving in the opposite direction. This population displacement was enormously disruptive to the social and economic fabric of both regions, destroying long-established commercial networks, displacing skilled artisans and traders, and creating massive refugee populations in the major cities.

Khan's analysis of the economic consequences of Partition situates it within his broader framework of colonial political economy: Partition was not simply a consequence of communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims; it was also a consequence of the colonial economic structures that had created specific regional concentrations of industry and commerce that crossed the communal boundaries that Partition enforced. The economic dislocation produced by Partition was thus a direct result of the colonial policies that had created the jute monoculture, concentrated processing capacity in Calcutta, and drawn communal boundaries that cut across existing economic geographies.

22.6 The East-West Pakistan Economic Relationship

The creation of Pakistan in 1947 created a new set of economic asymmetries that are crucial for understanding the political economy that eventually produced the Liberation War of 1971. East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan were economically very different: East Pakistan was more densely populated, its economy was primarily agricultural (centered on jute and rice cultivation), and it had relatively little industrial infrastructure. West Pakistan had a less dense population, more diverse agricultural conditions, and, over the 1950s and 1960s, received the lion's share of the investment in industrial development that transformed the Pakistani economy.

The economic exploitation of East Pakistan by the West Pakistani-dominated central state is well documented. East Pakistan consistently generated a trade surplus (primarily through jute exports) that was used to finance development in West Pakistan. Central government investment in industrial and infrastructure development was heavily concentrated in West Pakistan. The civil service and the military, which were the primary instruments of state power, were dominated by West Pakistanis. And the exchange rate policy maintained the rupee at a rate that benefited West Pakistani exporters at the expense of East Pakistani jute producers.

Khan situates this economic exploitation within his broader analysis of colonial and postcolonial political economy: the relationship between East and West Pakistan reproduced, in important ways, the colonial relationship between a resource-supplying periphery and an industrializing center, with the difference that the center was now located not in London but in Karachi and Lahore. This analysis connects the Liberation War directly to the logic of political economy: the movement for Bengali independence was not only a cultural and political response to linguistic and administrative discrimination; it was also an economic response to a system of exploitation that systematically transferred the surplus created by East Bengali labor to the western wing of the country.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE POSTCOLONIAL ECONOMY OF BANGLADESH

23.1 Independence and Economic Inheritance

When Bangladesh became independent in December 1971, it inherited an economy that had been shaped by two centuries of colonial extraction and a quarter century of internal colonial exploitation within Pakistan. The new state faced immediate and severe economic challenges:

the physical destruction caused by the Liberation War (infrastructure, industrial plant, and agricultural capital had all been damaged or destroyed), the disruption of trade networks, the mass displacement of population, and the complete absence of the administrative and financial institutions that would be needed to manage the economy of an independent state.

The economic policies of the first Mujib government (1972-1975) reflected the socialist commitments of the Awami League and the broader political aspirations of the Liberation War movement. Major industries were nationalized, including the jute mills and textile factories that had been owned by Pakistani capital. A program of land reform was announced, though its implementation was limited and inconsistent. The constitution committed the state to building a socialist economy.

But the socialist aspirations of the early post-independence period quickly ran into the reality of the structural conditions described above. Bangladesh's economy was too deeply integrated into the world capitalist system (as a supplier of labor-intensive goods and services) for a genuine socialist transformation to be achievable in the short term, and the national bourgeoisie that had come to power through the Liberation War had no real interest in the socialist transformation of the economy that would have been required by the revolution's promises. The nationalized industries became sites of patronage and corruption rather than engines of socialist development. The land reform program was blocked by the landed elite that was closely connected to the ruling party. And the economic situation was further deteriorated by a devastating famine in 1974 that killed hundreds of thousands of people and that exposed the weakness of the state's capacity to manage the food economy.

Khan's analysis of this early post-independence period is among his most acutely critical. He sees in it the paradigmatic demonstration of his thesis about the "derailed revolution": the moment at which the transformative potential of the Liberation War was foreclosed by the class interests of the national bourgeoisie. The failure to implement genuine land reform, the corruption of the nationalisation program, the incompetence of the economic management: all of these were not simply failures of policy or governance; they were expressions of the class character of the state that emerged from the liberation struggle.

23.2 The Garment Industry: Accumulation, Exploitation, and Global Value Chains

The emergence of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry as the dominant sector of the Bangladeshi economy is the most important economic development in the country's post-independence history, and it is a development that requires analysis at multiple levels: the level of global value chains, the level of labor relations and class formation, the level of gender relations (since the garment industry workforce is predominantly female), and the level of the state's role in creating and maintaining the conditions for the industry's development.

Bangladesh's garment industry began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, taking advantage of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA), a system of quotas that limited the amount of textile and clothing exports that countries like South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong could send to the United States and Europe. Because Bangladesh was not initially subject to these quotas, it could offer quota-free access to the US and European markets, giving it a competitive advantage over

the more established Asian producers. This advantage, combined with extremely low wages (a legacy of the economic conditions described above), attracted investment from South Korean, Taiwanese, and later local Bangladeshi entrepreneurs.

The industry grew rapidly and today employs approximately four million workers, of whom approximately eighty percent are women. Bangladesh is now the world's second-largest exporter of garments after China, and the garment industry accounts for approximately eighty percent of Bangladesh's export earnings and about thirteen percent of GDP. The industry has, by any measure, been economically significant: it has provided employment and income to millions of Bangladeshis who would otherwise have had very limited economic opportunities, and it has been a major driver of GDP growth and poverty reduction.

But Khan's analysis of the garment industry refuses to treat this economic significance as a straightforward success story. He situates the industry within the global value chain framework developed by economists like Gary Gereffi, who has shown that in "buyer-driven" commodity chains (like the garment industry, where the major brands and retailers control the most profitable nodes of the chain), the manufacturing producers in developing countries capture only a small fraction of the total value created. The major brands (H and M, Zara, Gap, Walmart, Primark) that source garments from Bangladesh control the design, branding, and retail operations that generate the highest margins, while the actual manufacturing is contracted to producers in Bangladesh who compete against each other primarily on the basis of price, keeping wages and working conditions at the lowest possible level.

This global value chain structure means that even as the garment industry has generated significant employment and economic activity in Bangladesh, the majority of the value created by that activity has been appropriated by the major brands and their shareholders in the rich countries. The Bangladeshi worker who sews a shirt for which the final retail price is fifty dollars typically receives wages that amount to a few cents of that price; the rest goes to the brand, the logistics companies, the retailers, and the various intermediaries in the chain.

23.3 The Rana Plaza Disaster and the Politics of Safety

The collapse of the Rana Plaza building in April 2013, which killed 1,134 garment workers and injured over 2,500 more, was the deadliest industrial accident in the history of the garment industry and one of the deadliest in the history of any industry. The disaster brought international attention to the conditions in which Bangladesh's garment workers labor and to the responsibility of the global brands that source garments from Bangladeshi factories.

Khan's analysis of the Rana Plaza disaster situates it within his broader framework of political economy and postcolonial critique. The disaster was not simply the result of a rogue factory owner's greed or of inadequate regulatory oversight; it was the systemic product of the global value chain structure that creates intense price pressure on Bangladeshi producers, forcing them to minimize costs including the costs of ensuring building safety. The global brands that sourced garments from Rana Plaza were not ignorant of the conditions in their supply chains; they were complicit in creating those conditions through the price pressures they exerted.

The international response to Rana Plaza, including the establishment of the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (a legally binding agreement between global brands and trade unions to improve safety standards in Bangladeshi factories) and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (a weaker, voluntary initiative by North American brands), illustrates the politics of corporate social responsibility and its limitations. Khan's analysis would situate these initiatives within the framework of what David Held calls "cosmopolitan democracy": the attempt to extend principles of democratic accountability to the global level, holding transnational corporations accountable for the conditions in their supply chains. While these initiatives represented genuine improvements in specific dimensions of worker safety, they left the fundamental value chain structure unchanged: the brands continued to appropriate the majority of the value created by Bangladeshi labor, while assuming responsibility only for specific dimensions of working conditions.

23.4 Labor, Gender, and the Feminization of Manufacturing

The predominance of women in the Bangladeshi garment industry is not accidental; it is a product of specific historical and social conditions that connect gender relations to the political economy of labor-intensive manufacturing. Understanding why the garment industry employs predominantly women, and what the consequences of this feminization of manufacturing are for gender relations in Bangladesh, requires analysis at both the macro level (the structure of the global economy) and the micro level (the specific social relations of gender, family, and community in Bangladesh).

At the macro level, the feminization of manufacturing in developing countries is a well-documented global phenomenon, analyzed extensively by feminist economists and sociologists including Diane Elson, Ruth Pearson, and Naila Kabeer. Their argument is that the concentration of women in export-oriented manufacturing reflects not women's comparative advantage in delicate manual work (the standard explanation offered by industry), but rather the specific social conditions that make women's labor particularly cheap and compliant: women's subordination in the domestic sphere, which makes them willing to accept lower wages than men because they are understood to be working for "supplementary" income; their limited alternatives to factory employment due to discrimination in other labor markets; and the ideological construction of their labor as more suitable for factory work due to their supposedly greater patience, dexterity, and docility.

Naila Kabeer's groundbreaking research on Bangladeshi garment workers, particularly her book *The Power to Choose* (2000), complicates this picture by showing that many women workers experience factory employment as a form of agency and relative freedom compared to the constraints of domestic life and early marriage. The ability to earn an independent income, however small, gives women a degree of bargaining power within the household that they would otherwise lack. This does not mean that the conditions of garment factory employment are good; it means that the alternatives facing many women workers are so constrained that even poorly paid factory work represents a genuine expansion of their options.

Khan's engagement with this dimension of the garment industry's political economy connects his economic analysis to his concerns about gender equality. He is aware of the tension between the

feminist critique of the industry's exploitation of women's labor and the feminist recognition of the industry's role in expanding women's economic agency. His response is characteristically dialectical: the expansion of women's employment in the garment industry represents a real, if limited, advance in gender equality, but this advance is achieved through a system of exploitation that benefits primarily from women's social subordination and that leaves unchanged (and in some ways reinforces) the structural conditions of gender inequality.

23.5 Remittances, Migration, and the Transnational Labor Economy

Bangladesh is one of the world's major sources of migrant labor, with approximately ten million Bangladeshis working abroad, primarily in the oil-rich countries of the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait), but also in Malaysia, Singapore, and increasingly in other regions. The remittances sent home by these migrant workers (approximately 22 billion dollars in 2023) are a crucial source of income for the Bangladeshi economy, making up roughly eight percent of GDP and providing livelihoods for a significant proportion of the population.

The political economy of labor migration and remittances is complex, and Khan's analysis of it draws on his broader framework of dependency and exploitation. At one level, migration represents an opportunity: for individual workers and their families, the opportunity to earn wages that are many times higher than what they could earn in Bangladesh; for the Bangladeshi economy, the opportunity to reduce unemployment and generate foreign exchange through remittances. But at another level, migration represents a form of labor export that benefits both the receiving countries (which get cheap labor without bearing the social costs of raising and educating that labor) and the Bangladeshi elite (which exports the social costs of unemployment and underemployment without having to address the structural causes of those problems).

The condition of migrant workers, particularly in the Gulf countries, has been widely documented as involving significant exploitation and abuse: workers often pay large fees to recruiting agencies in Bangladesh (putting them in debt before they even arrive), they face conditions of work and accommodation that are frequently below international standards, they have limited legal protections and limited access to justice when their rights are violated, and they face the constant threat of deportation if they complain or organize. The kafala (sponsorship) system in many Gulf countries ties workers legally to a specific employer, making it impossible for them to leave an abusive employment situation without risking deportation.

Khan's analysis of this situation connects to his broader critique of the Bangladeshi state's failure to protect the interests of its citizens in their dealings with more powerful global actors. The Bangladeshi government's reluctance to challenge the conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Gulf reflects the political economy of a dependent state: the remittances that migrant workers send home are too important to the government's foreign exchange position to risk disrupting the relationships with Gulf states that make migration possible, even at the cost of condoning the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers.

23.6 The State and Economic Development: Between Neoliberalism and Developmentalism

Khan's analysis of the Bangladeshi economy's development trajectory engages with the major debates in development economics about the role of the state in promoting economic development. These debates have been central in economics and political science since at least the 1950s, and they have been particularly intense in the context of East Asian development (the "East Asian miracle") and its relevance for countries like Bangladesh.

The neoliberal position, dominant in international financial institutions (the IMF and World Bank) since the 1980s, holds that economic development is best achieved through market liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises, reduction of government intervention in the economy, and integration into the global trading system. This is the position that the Washington Consensus (the package of policy prescriptions promoted by the IMF and World Bank for developing countries in financial difficulty) represented, and it is the position that has shaped economic policy in many developing countries including Bangladesh since the 1980s.

The developmental state position, associated with economists like Alice Amsden, Robert Wade, and Ha-Joon Chang (building on the analysis of the Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese development models), argues that the successful cases of rapid economic development in East Asia were achieved not through market liberalization but through active state intervention in the economy: industrial policy that identified strategic sectors for development, protection of infant industries, investment in education and infrastructure, and the use of state power to discipline both capital and labor in the interests of national development.

Khan's position in this debate is informed by his Marxist framework and by his postcolonial critique of the neoliberal development model. He is critical of the neoliberal prescriptions that have dominated international development policy, seeing them as ideological expressions of the interests of global capital rather than genuine prescriptions for development. But he is also aware of the limitations of the developmental state model: the East Asian development states were able to achieve rapid industrialization in part because of specific historical conditions (including US strategic support during the Cold War, access to American technology through licensing arrangements, and the ability to capture technology from Japan) that are not replicable in the current global context.

His alternative is not fully elaborated, but it points toward a model of development that combines state investment in public goods (education, infrastructure, health), active industrial policy to promote diversification beyond the garment sector, stronger labor rights and social protection, and a more assertive stance in international trade and investment negotiations. Crucially, this alternative would require a different kind of state: not the current Bangladeshi state, which Khan sees as captured by the interests of a comprador bourgeoisie, but a state genuinely oriented toward the interests of the majority.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY: IMPERIALISM, FINANCIALIZATION, AND ALTERNATIVES

24.1 Contemporary Imperialism: Beyond the Classical Theories

The classical Marxist theories of imperialism, developed by Lenin (*Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917), Rosa Luxemburg (*The Accumulation of Capital*, 1913), and Rudolf Hilferding (*Finance Capital*, 1910), were responses to the specific features of imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century: the territorial division of the world among the European great powers, the export of capital from the metropolitan centers to the colonies and semi-colonies, and the fusion of industrial and financial capital into "finance capital." These classical theories have been significantly developed and modified by subsequent Marxist economists and political economists to address the changed features of imperialism in the post-World War Two period.

Khan draws on both the classical theories and their contemporary developments in his analysis of Bangladesh's position in the global political economy. The key developments in contemporary imperialism that he attends to include: the replacement of formal territorial colonialism with informal economic and political dependency (what Kwame Nkrumah called "neo-colonialism"), the rise of transnational corporations as the primary vehicles of international capital accumulation, the development of a global financial system centered on the US dollar and controlled by American financial institutions and the international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank), and the use of debt as a mechanism of political control (what David Graeber analyzed in his wide-ranging study *Debt: The First 5000 Years*).

The debt mechanism is particularly important in the Bangladeshi context. Bangladesh, like many developing countries, carries a significant burden of external debt (owed to foreign governments, multilateral institutions, and commercial creditors), and the servicing of this debt represents a regular transfer of resources from Bangladesh to its creditors. The conditions attached to IMF and World Bank loans, which typically require liberalization of trade and investment, reduction of government spending, and privatization of state-owned enterprises, constrain the economic policy options available to the Bangladeshi government in ways that benefit the interests of international capital at the expense of the development needs of the population.

24.2 The Dollar Standard and Monetary Imperialism

Khan's doctoral research on central banking history gives him a specific vantage point on one of the most important dimensions of contemporary imperialism: the monetary system. The current international monetary system is organized around the US dollar as the world's primary reserve currency, the medium of international trade, and the unit of account for commodities like oil. This arrangement, established in its current form by the Bretton Woods agreements of 1944 (and significantly modified by Nixon's suspension of dollar-gold convertibility in 1971), gives the United States extraordinary privileges: it can run persistent trade deficits without facing the balance-of-payments crises that would afflict any other country, and it can export its inflation to the rest of the world.

For developing countries like Bangladesh, the dollar standard creates specific forms of vulnerability. Their currencies are typically priced in relation to the dollar, and fluctuations in the dollar's value can have dramatic effects on their economies. Their external debts are typically denominated in dollars, so dollar appreciation increases the real burden of their debt in local currency terms. And their access to international financial markets depends on the confidence of international investors (primarily based in the United States and other rich countries) in their

creditworthiness, which in turn depends on their willingness to follow the policy prescriptions of the IMF and World Bank.

Khan situates this monetary imperialism within the long history of the relationship between money, state power, and international political economy that he studied in his doctoral research. Just as the gold standard of the nineteenth century was not simply a neutral technical arrangement but was a mechanism through which British financial interests dominated the international monetary system, so the dollar standard of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is not simply a neutral technical arrangement but is a mechanism through which American financial and political power is projected globally.

24.3 Financialization and Its Consequences

One of the most significant developments in the global political economy since the 1970s has been the process of financialization: the growing dominance of financial capital, financial markets, and financial institutions in the overall economy, and the increasing subordination of production and employment to the imperatives of financial accumulation. This process has been documented and analyzed extensively by economists including Gerald Epstein, Costas Lapavistas, and Ben Fine, and by sociologists including Greta Krippner and Saskia Sassen.

The key features of financialization include: the massive expansion of the financial sector relative to the productive economy, the development of new financial instruments (derivatives, securitization, leveraged buyouts) that generate profits through financial manipulation rather than productive investment, the increasing use of financial techniques (stock buybacks, dividend maximization, "shareholder value" ideology) in the management of non-financial corporations, and the increasing integration of households into financial markets through pension funds, mortgage debt, student loans, and consumer credit.

For Bangladesh, the consequences of global financialization are felt primarily through the country's integration into international financial markets and through the activities of international financial institutions. The availability (and cost) of external financing for the Bangladeshi government depends on the dynamics of global financial markets; when global risk appetite is high (as in the mid-2000s), capital flows into developing countries and the cost of financing is low; when risk appetite is low (as in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis), capital flows out and financing costs rise, regardless of any change in Bangladesh's own economic fundamentals. This dependence on the vagaries of global financial markets constrains economic policy and creates conditions of vulnerability that are entirely outside the control of the Bangladeshi government.

Khan's analysis of financialization connects his historical research on central banking to his contemporary political economy. Just as the financial crises of the nineteenth century (which he analyzed in his dissertation) were expressions of the contradictions of the credit system that Marx had analyzed, so the financial crises of the twenty-first century are expressions of the deepened contradictions of a global financial system that has expanded far beyond the productive economy that is supposed to underpin it. The tools of analysis that the Banking School debates

provide are not antique curiosities; they illuminate the logic of a financial system whose fundamental tensions have not changed, only amplified.

24.4 Climate Change, Environmental Justice, and Political Economy

A dimension of global political economy that was not central to Khan's earlier work but that has become increasingly important in his recent interventions is the political economy of climate change and environmental justice. Bangladesh is one of the countries most severely threatened by climate change: it is a low-lying delta country, much of it at or near sea level, and the predicted rise in sea levels associated with global warming poses an existential threat to large parts of the country's territory and population.

The political economy of climate change raises questions that connect directly to Khan's broader framework. The countries most threatened by climate change (including Bangladesh) are, overwhelmingly, the poor countries of the Global South that have contributed least to the greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change. The countries most responsible for climate change are the industrialized countries of the Global North that have benefited from two centuries of fossil-fuel-based economic development. This asymmetry between those who cause climate change and those who suffer its consequences is one of the clearest expressions of the global inequality that Khan's postcolonial analysis addresses.

Khan situates the climate crisis within his dependency framework: the ecological debt that the Global North owes the Global South, the result of centuries of resource extraction that have both depleted natural wealth and contributed disproportionately to atmospheric carbon concentrations, is an extension of the economic debt that the colonial and postcolonial systems have generated. Addressing climate change requires not just technical solutions (renewable energy, carbon capture) but a fundamental transformation of the global economic order that produced it.

24.5 Alternatives: From BRICS to New Economic Frameworks

Khan's critical analysis of the existing global economic order raises the question of alternatives: what would a more just and equitable global economic order look like, and how might it be achieved? This is perhaps the most difficult question that his political economy confronts, and it is one on which his work is less fully developed than on the critical side.

Several frameworks for thinking about alternatives have emerged in recent years that connect to Khan's analysis. The BRICS economic alliance (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and more recently the expanded BRICS Plus grouping, represents an attempt by major emerging economies to develop economic relationships that are less dependent on the dollar system and less subject to the conditions imposed by Western-dominated financial institutions. The New Development Bank (established by the BRICS countries) is an explicit attempt to create an alternative to the IMF and World Bank. And various regional monetary arrangements (including the Chiang Mai Initiative in East Asia) represent attempts to create regional financial safety nets that reduce dependence on the IMF.

Khan's attitude toward these initiatives is cautious. He recognizes them as genuine attempts to challenge the hegemony of the existing global economic order, and he is sympathetic to the political motivations that drive them. But he is also aware that the BRICS groupings are themselves internally diverse (including both advanced developing countries like China and India, with their own imperial dimensions, and smaller developing countries), and that the alternatives they represent may not be fundamentally different from the existing order in terms of their relationship to global capital and their commitment to the interests of their own domestic elites.

His analysis of these developments reflects his broader methodological commitment to dialectical analysis: he refuses both the simple celebration of any challenge to Western hegemony and the simple defense of the existing order, seeking instead to analyze the specific class interests, political dynamics, and structural conditions that shape each alternative and to assess its genuine potential for contributing to a more just and equitable global economic order.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE MISSING LINK

25.1 Why Political Economy Needs Psychoanalysis

Throughout this Part, we have been examining Khan's political economy primarily on its own terms: as an analysis of material conditions, class relations, and structural dependencies. But the full power of Khan's analytical framework only becomes visible when we see how the political economy connects to the psychoanalytic and cultural dimensions of his work that we examined in Parts One and Two.

The connection is not simply additive: it is not that the political economy describes the material "base" while the psychoanalytic analysis describes the cultural "superstructure." The relationship is more dialectical and more intimate. The material conditions of the political economy produce specific forms of subjectivity, specific configurations of desire and identification, and specific modes of jouissance, which in turn sustain and reproduce those material conditions. Understanding this dialectical relationship between the material and the psychic is the most ambitious and most distinctive dimension of Khan's intellectual project.

We can illustrate this with a specific example. The garment industry's political economy (which we analyzed in section 23.2) is not just a matter of wages, working conditions, and value chains; it is also a matter of the specific forms of subjectivity that the industry produces and requires. The garment worker who goes to the factory every day, who manages the physical and emotional demands of the production process, who negotiates the complex social dynamics of the factory floor, and who brings her wages home to contribute to the household economy: this person's subjectivity is shaped by all of these conditions in ways that cannot be reduced to the economic variables of the political economy.

Lacan's analysis of the subject as constituted through desire and lack provides a framework for thinking about these subjective dimensions of the political economy. The garment worker's desire, her sense of herself as someone who acts in the world and who has aspirations and possibilities, is shaped by the specific symbolic order in which she lives: by the discourse of "women's empowerment" through economic participation (which is the official ideology of the microfinance and development apparatus), by the discourse of family obligation and the need to contribute to the household economy, by the discourse of individual advancement through hard work (which is the ideology of the labor market), and by her experience of the gap between these discourses and the actual conditions of her working life.

25.2 The Ideology of Development and the Colonial Desire for Modernization

Khan's analysis of the ideology of development is one of the places where his political economy and his psychoanalytic cultural criticism converge most productively. The "development" discourse that shapes how Bangladesh (and other postcolonial countries) understands its own situation and its aspirations is, from Khan's perspective, a form of ideology in the Lacanian sense: it is not simply a set of false beliefs about economic processes, but a structure of desire that organizes the subject's relationship to the social world in ways that serve specific power interests.

The development discourse organizes desire around a specific fantasy object: the "developed" country, the modern society that has overcome poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment and achieved the kind of affluence and opportunity that the rich countries of the Global North represent. This fantasy object functions, in Lacanian terms, as an *objet petit a*: it is the object of desire that appears to promise satisfaction but whose function is to sustain desire rather than to satisfy it. Each time a developing country achieves a specific development target (a particular level of per capita income, a particular literacy rate, a particular infrastructure standard), the goal posts are moved and a new, more demanding standard is set. The developing country is always on the path to development, never having arrived.

This analysis does not mean that development goals are worthless or that improvements in living standards are not real achievements. It means that the specific form in which development aspiration is organized within the current global order systematically positions the developing country as perpetually lacking by comparison to the developed norm, and that this positioning serves the interests of those who define and enforce the norm (primarily the rich countries and the international financial institutions they dominate). A different form of development aspiration, one organized around the specific needs and capacities of each society rather than around the standard of the rich countries, would require a different relationship to desire: not the mimetic desire for what the Other has, but the more autonomous desire for what one's own situation and tradition require.

25.3 The Colonial Inheritance and the Superego of Underdevelopment

Lacan's concept of the superego (borrowed from Freud but significantly transformed) provides another tool for analyzing the psychic dimensions of the political economy of underdevelopment. For Lacan, the superego is not simply the internalized voice of social norms and prohibitions; it

is more specifically the agency that commands enjoyment, that says "you must enjoy!" in a way that is paradoxically more oppressive than any simple prohibition. The superego's command is impossible to satisfy: it demands a *jouissance* that is structurally unattainable, and it punishes the subject for failing to achieve what it demands.

In the context of postcolonial development, the superego of underdevelopment is the internalized standard of the "developed" country that perpetually finds the developing country lacking and that generates a chronic sense of inadequacy, shame, and failure. The Bangladeshi professional who is ashamed of his country's poverty, who experiences Bangladesh's underdevelopment as a personal failure rather than a systemic condition produced by historical forces, who drives himself and others with a relentless demand for "development" that can never be satisfied: this person is subject to the superego of underdevelopment in Lacan's sense.

Khan's analysis of this psychic dimension of underdevelopment connects to his critique of the colonial cringe: the shame about one's own language and culture that leads educated Bangladeshis to prefer English is one manifestation of this broader superego dynamic. But the analysis extends beyond language to the entire field of economic and social aspiration: the desire to be "modern," to achieve the standard of living of the rich countries, to escape the stigma of being "underdeveloped," generates a form of mimetic desire that is both psychically damaging (because it positions the subject as inherently deficient) and politically disabling (because it makes it difficult to imagine alternatives to the existing global order).

Khan's alternative, implicit in his advocacy for Bengali-medium education and his insistence on the value of the local cultural tradition, is a form of what might be called "decolonial desire": not the abolition of desire for improvement and development, but the reorientation of that desire toward goals that are defined by one's own situation and tradition rather than by the standards of the colonizer. This reorientation of desire requires, in psychoanalytic terms, a traversal of the fantasy: a movement beyond the fantasy of becoming the Other (the developed country, the modern subject, the English-speaking cosmopolitan) toward a more authentic relationship to one's own desire, one that acknowledges the specific conditions and possibilities of one's own situation.

25.4 Class Consciousness and Psychoanalytic Critique

The concept of class consciousness, central to the Marxist tradition since Lukacs's famous analysis, raises a question that psychoanalytic theory helps to sharpen: how is it possible for members of the working class to develop an accurate understanding of their situation (class consciousness) when the conditions of their existence systematically produce forms of consciousness that misrepresent that situation (false consciousness, ideology)?

For Lukacs, class consciousness was not simply a matter of having the right beliefs about one's economic situation; it was a matter of achieving the standpoint of the social totality, seeing one's situation not from the limited perspective of an individual or even a particular group, but from the perspective of the whole social formation and its contradictions. This standpoint was, for Lukacs, potentially available to the working class (as the class whose interests corresponded with

those of humanity as a whole) but systematically blocked by the reification that capitalism produces.

Khan's psychoanalytic supplement to this account identifies specific psychic mechanisms that block the development of class consciousness, and that complement the more structural account of ideology that Althusser develops. These include: the narcissistic investment in an ego-ideal (the image of the successful individual who has risen above his class of origin through hard work and individual achievement) that makes it difficult to see oneself as part of a collective class situation; the identificatory investments in national, religious, or ethnic identities that cut across class lines and make class solidarity difficult to sustain; and the forms of jouissance attached to submission and subordination (what Lacan analyzes in terms of masochism and the death drive) that make people willing to accept conditions of exploitation that are against their interests in any straightforward sense.

Understanding these psychic mechanisms is practically important for anyone who is interested in building the kind of political movements that might challenge the existing order. If class consciousness were simply a matter of information (telling people the truth about their situation), then political education would be the primary tool of emancipation. But if class consciousness is also a psychic achievement (requiring the traversal of specific fantasies and the renegotiation of specific identificatory investments), then political work requires also a transformation of psychic structures: a form of political therapy that addresses the desires and identifications that bind people to conditions of their own exploitation.

25.5 Economic Analysis and Literary Form

A distinctive feature of Khan's engagement with political economy, and one that marks his work as that of a humanist intellectual rather than a professional economist, is his attention to the literary and rhetorical dimensions of economic discourse. Economic texts, like all texts, have a rhetorical dimension: they construct their authority through specific narrative strategies, through the organization of evidence and argument, through the deployment of metaphors and analogies, and through the management of the reader's expectations and desires. Understanding how economic texts achieve their effects requires attention to their literary form as well as their logical content.

Khan has written about the literary dimensions of economic texts in several contexts, drawing on the tradition of "economic rhetoric" associated with the work of Deirdre McCloskey (whose *The Rhetoric of Economics*, 1985, pioneered the analysis of economic discourse as a form of literary practice). His analysis of the rhetoric of development economics, for instance, is attentive to how the metaphors deployed in development discourse (the "ladder" of development, the "take-off" into self-sustaining growth, the "poverty trap") shape how the development problem is understood and constrain the range of solutions that are considered.

This attention to the literary form of economic discourse connects Khan's political economy to his broader cultural criticism and to his literary sensibility. He is not just an analyst of economic structures and material conditions; he is also a reader of texts, and his reading of economic texts is as careful and as theoretically informed as his reading of literary ones. The combination of

close textual reading and structural economic analysis is one of the most distinctive features of his intellectual practice, and it produces forms of insight that neither approach could achieve in isolation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES AND THE QUESTION OF DEVELOPMENT BEYOND CAPITALISM

26.1 Can Bangladesh Develop Without Capitalism?

One of the most fundamental questions that Khan's political economy raises is the question of whether the kind of development that Bangladesh requires, a development that addresses the basic needs of the majority, reduces inequality, ensures human dignity and social justice, is achievable within the framework of global capitalism, or whether it requires a fundamental transformation of the economic order. This question does not have an easy answer, and Khan's treatment of it reflects the tension between his Marxist commitment to the supersession of capitalism and his practical political judgments about what is achievable in the current historical conjuncture.

The orthodox Marxist position would be that genuine development for the working classes of Bangladesh is impossible under capitalism: the structural logic of capital accumulation requires the extraction of surplus value from labor, and the position of a peripheral country in the global value chain means that much of this surplus value flows to the metropolitan centers rather than being reinvested in local development. On this view, genuine development requires a socialist transformation of both the Bangladeshi economy and the global economic order.

Khan is sympathetic to this analysis but does not treat the socialist transformation as an immediately achievable goal. His political assessments are more immediate and tactical: within the existing framework, what policies and institutional arrangements would most effectively serve the interests of the majority? His answers to this question, as we have seen, include: stronger labor rights and social protection, Bengali-medium education, agricultural reform, more assertive international trade policy, and a state that is genuinely oriented toward the interests of the majority rather than captured by the comprador elite.

These are reformist rather than revolutionary proposals, and Khan is aware of the tension between his Marxist theoretical framework (which implies the necessity of fundamental transformation) and his practical political proposals (which work within the existing framework). His response to this tension is to situate his reformist proposals within a longer historical perspective: these are not the final goals but the immediate demands that could advance the power and organization of the working class and that could create conditions more favorable for more fundamental transformation in the future.

26.2 The Commons, Solidarity Economy, and Alternative Economic Forms

Beyond the mainstream debate between capitalism and socialism, a range of alternative economic forms have been developed and analyzed in recent decades that provide resources for thinking about alternatives to the existing Bangladeshi economic order. These include: the commons and commoning (associated with the work of Elinor Ostrom and David Bollier), the solidarity economy (associated with the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham and others), and the cooperative movement.

The concept of the commons refers to forms of collective governance of shared resources that are neither privately owned (subject to market allocation) nor publicly owned (subject to state control). Commons arrangements, which manage everything from fisheries to irrigation systems to urban spaces, have been shown by Ostrom's research to be capable of sustainable and equitable management that outperforms both private and public alternatives in specific contexts. The commons concept has been extended by theorists like Bollier to cover digital commons (free and open source software, Wikipedia, the creative commons licensing framework) and knowledge commons more broadly.

The significance of the commons concept for Bangladesh is multiple. Bangladesh has a long tradition of common resource management in its agricultural communities (managing water access, common lands, and other shared resources through local institutions), and these traditions have been both disrupted by colonial and post-colonial development policies and sustained in modified forms in various communities. Theorizing and strengthening these common resource institutions, rather than privatizing them (as neoliberal development policy tends to favor) or nationalizing them (as socialist policy tends to favor), might provide a more appropriate path for aspects of Bangladeshi economic development.

The solidarity economy concept, associated particularly with the feminist economists J.K. Gibson-Graham (the combined pen name of Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson), challenges the assumption that "the economy" is a unified system dominated by capitalist market relations. Gibson-Graham argue that capitalist markets are just one of many forms of economic activity, alongside households, cooperatives, gift economies, barter systems, and various other arrangements, and that the diversity of these forms opens up possibilities for non-capitalist development that the dominant economic framework renders invisible.

Applied to Bangladesh, this perspective draws attention to the vast realm of non-market economic activity that sustains the majority of the population: subsistence agriculture, household food production, community labor exchange, informal mutual aid networks. These forms of economic activity are not simply pre-capitalist survivals that will eventually be replaced by market relations; they are enduring social practices that perform essential economic functions and that could be strengthened and expanded as part of an alternative development strategy.

26.3 Technology, Labor, and the Future of Work in Bangladesh

The question of technology and its relationship to labor is one of the most pressing dimensions of the political economy of development in the twenty-first century, and it has direct relevance to Bangladesh's situation. The garment industry, which provides employment for four million workers, faces the threat of automation: advances in robotics and computer-controlled sewing

machinery are making it technically feasible to automate many of the operations currently performed by human workers. If garment manufacturing is automated on the scale that some analysts predict, the consequences for Bangladeshi employment could be catastrophic.

But the question of technology and labor is not simply a question of automation threatening existing jobs; it is a broader question about the relationship between technological development and the distribution of the gains from that development. In the current political economy, the gains from technological innovation accrue primarily to the owners of capital (who can use technology to reduce labor costs and increase profits) and to the skilled workers in rich countries who develop and maintain the technology. The workers whose labor is displaced by technology bear the costs (unemployment, wage reduction) while capturing little of the benefit.

Khan's analysis of this situation connects to his broader critique of the colonial division of labor. Just as the colonial economy positioned Bengal as a supplier of raw materials while concentrating the value-added processing in the metropolitan center, so the contemporary technological economy positions Bangladesh as a supplier of cheap, labor-intensive manufacturing while the high-value-added activities (technology development, design, branding, financial services) are concentrated in the rich countries. Addressing this technological dependency requires not just access to existing technology but the development of the indigenous technological capacity that would allow Bangladesh to participate in the high-value segments of the global economy.

26.4 Fiscal Policy, Taxation, and Economic Justice

A dimension of economic analysis that is often neglected in the discussion of development economics but that is central to questions of economic justice is the question of fiscal policy: how the state raises revenue (through taxation and other means) and how it allocates that revenue (through public expenditure). Fiscal policy is, in an important sense, the most direct expression of the political economy of any state: who pays taxes, who benefits from public expenditure, and what principles govern these distributions reflect the actual (as opposed to stated) values and power relations of the political economy.

Bangladesh's tax system is characterized by several features that reflect the power of the dominant classes: a relatively low overall tax burden (tax revenue as a share of GDP is among the lowest in Asia), a heavy reliance on indirect taxes (particularly value-added tax) that fall disproportionately on lower-income groups, low rates of direct (income and wealth) taxation that benefit the wealthy, and widespread tax evasion by the business and professional classes.

Khan's analysis of the fiscal system connects to his broader critique of the Bangladeshi ruling class's failure to fulfill its social obligations. The state's inability to provide adequate public education, public health, and social protection for the majority reflects, in part, the state's failure to mobilize adequate fiscal resources from those most able to pay. A genuine commitment to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that Khan identifies as foundational would require a significant transformation of the fiscal system: a shift toward more progressive direct taxation, stronger enforcement against tax evasion, and significantly increased public investment in social provision.

This fiscal transformation would require confronting the political power of the wealthy classes that benefit from the current system. And this, in turn, is why Khan insists that economic reform cannot be separated from political transformation: the fiscal changes required for social justice cannot be achieved without a political movement capable of challenging the power of those who benefit from the status quo.

CONCLUSION TO PART THREE

Part Three has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the political economy that underpins Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We began with his doctoral research on central banking history, showing how this apparently technical topic connects to fundamental questions in monetary theory and political economy that remain urgently relevant today. We then examined his analysis of the political economy of colonialism in Bengal, situating Bangladesh's current economic conditions within the long history of colonial extraction and structural dependency. We examined the specific features of the post-independence economy, including the garment industry, labor migration, and the role of the state. And we engaged with broader questions of global political economy, including contemporary imperialism, financialization, climate change, and the prospects for alternative economic arrangements.

Throughout this examination, we have emphasized the ways in which the political economy connects to the other dimensions of Khan's intellectual work: the philosophical framework of Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, the psychoanalytic analysis of ideology and desire, the legal and constitutional analysis of the postcolonial state, and the cultural criticism that runs through all of his work. The political economy is not a separate, self-contained analysis; it is the material foundation that gives the other dimensions of his work their grounding and their urgency.

Several key themes emerge from this examination. First, the theme of structural dependency: Bangladesh's economic underdevelopment is not a natural condition but a historically produced one, created through specific colonial and postcolonial processes of exploitation and extraction. Second, the theme of class power: the character of the Bangladeshi economic order reflects the interests and the power of a specific class formation, the comprador bourgeoisie, that has captured the state and used it to serve its own interests at the expense of the majority. Third, the theme of the limits of formal political independence: political independence in 1971 did not produce genuine economic sovereignty, and the persistence of structural dependency in new forms (through global value chains, external debt, and the conditionalities of international financial institutions) means that the promise of the Liberation War remains unfulfilled in the economic domain.

And fourth, the theme of alternatives: despite the power of these structural constraints, the space for genuine economic transformation exists and can be expanded through political action, institutional innovation, and the construction of new forms of solidarity and collective agency. This fourth theme, the possibility of genuine transformation, is what prevents Khan's political economy from collapsing into fatalism, and it is what connects his economic analysis to his commitment to the emancipatory promise of the Liberation War.

Part Four of this textbook will turn to the legal dimension of Khan's work, examining his analysis of colonial law, the postcolonial state, and the jurisprudential questions that his intellectual project raises.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART THREE

Key Economic Concepts and Frameworks

Endogenous Money Theory: The theory, associated with the Banking School tradition and with post-Keynesian economics, that the money supply is determined by the demand for credit from the economic system rather than by the decisions of the central bank. Contrasted with the exogenous money theory of the Currency School and of mainstream (neoclassical) macroeconomics.

Primitive Accumulation: Marx's concept for the historical processes through which the conditions for capitalist production were established, including the separation of producers from their means of production and the creation of a propertyless working class. Extended by subsequent Marxists and postcolonial theorists to analyze colonial dispossession.

The Drain of Wealth: The concept, introduced by Dadabhai Naoroji, for the systematic transfer of economic surplus from colonial India to Britain through the mechanisms of colonial governance and trade. Connected to contemporary analyses of illicit financial flows, profit repatriation, and unequal exchange.

Global Value Chains: The analytical framework, associated with Gary Gereffi, for analyzing how production is organized across national boundaries, with different activities (design, manufacturing, distribution, retail) performed in different locations. Used to analyze the distribution of value added and economic power across the chain.

Financialization: The growing dominance of financial capital, financial markets, and financial institutions in the overall economy, and the increasing subordination of production and employment to the imperatives of financial accumulation. Analyzed extensively by Gerald Epstein, Costas Lapavistas, and others.

The Kafala System: The sponsorship system that governs migrant labor in many Gulf countries, tying workers legally to a specific employer and significantly limiting their freedom of movement and their ability to seek legal redress for labor violations.

Discussion Questions for Part Three

1. Khan's doctoral research on central banking focuses on a debate between the Currency School and the Banking School about the proper basis of monetary policy. How does this historical debate connect to contemporary debates about central bank independence, quantitative easing, and the proper response to financial crises? What does Khan's

historical analysis suggest about the political dimensions of these apparently technical questions?

2. The concept of "primitive accumulation" is used by Marx to describe the historical processes through which capitalism was established in England. How does this concept apply to the colonial experience of Bengal? What specific forms did colonial primitive accumulation take, and what are their lasting consequences for the Bangladeshi economy?
3. Bangladesh's garment industry employs approximately four million workers, the majority of whom are women. Is this industry a form of exploitation of women's labor or a mechanism for women's economic empowerment? How does the political economy of the global value chain relate to the gender dimensions of the industry?
4. Khan argues that the international monetary system (organized around the dollar as the world's primary reserve currency) is a form of monetary imperialism. Is this characterization convincing? How does the history of the gold standard (which Khan studied in his doctoral research) illuminate the politics of the contemporary dollar standard?
5. The microfinance model, pioneered in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank, has been presented as a mechanism for poverty reduction and women's empowerment. Khan is critical of this model. Evaluate his critique: what are the strongest arguments against the microfinance model, and how do they connect to his broader political economy?
6. Khan argues that genuine economic development in Bangladesh requires a transformation of the political order, that economic reform cannot be separated from political transformation. Do you find this argument convincing? What are the mechanisms through which class power shapes economic policy, and what kinds of political change would be required to create a genuinely development-oriented state?
7. The threat of automation poses a serious challenge to Bangladesh's garment-dependent economy. How should Bangladesh respond to this threat? What resources does Khan's political economy provide for thinking about this challenge, and what are the limits of his framework in addressing it?

Extended Reading List for Part Three

On Monetary Theory and Banking History: Thomas Tooke and William Newmarch, *A History of Prices*; Henry Thornton, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Paper Credit of Great Britain*; Duncan K. Foley, *Understanding Capital*; Hyman Minsky, *Stabilizing an Unstable Economy*; and for contemporary debates, see the post-Keynesian journal *Metroeconomica* and the work of Marc Lavoie.

On Colonial Political Economy: Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*; R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*; Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, *A Theory of Imperialism*; Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*; and Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Colonialism and Indian Economy*.

On the Bangladeshi Economy: Naila Kabeer, *The Power to Choose*; Rehman Sobhan, *Transforming Eastern South Asia*; Anu Muhammad, *Development or Destruction?*; and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) research publications.

On Global Political Economy and Imperialism: Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*; Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*; Costas Lapavistas, *Profiting Without Producing*; and for contemporary imperialism, the journal *Historical Materialism*.

On Alternative Economics: Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*; J.K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*; David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*; and Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*.

End of Part Three

PART FOUR: LAW, JURISPRUDENCE, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE

Colonial Legal Inheritance, Constitutional Theory, Human Rights, and the Struggle for Justice

PREFACE TO PART FOUR

The first three Parts of this textbook established the biographical foundations, the philosophical framework, and the political economic substrata of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We are now in a position to examine a dimension of his work that is both foundational and frequently underexamined: his engagement with law, jurisprudence, and the theory of the state.

Khan is, by his original professional formation, a legal scholar. He was trained in law at the University of Dhaka, he has taught law at multiple institutions across his career, and his doctoral dissertation at The New School engaged with the legal-institutional dimensions of central banking in nineteenth-century England. But his engagement with law goes far deeper than professional affiliation. For Khan, law is one of the primary sites through which social relations of domination are constituted, legitimized, and reproduced, and it is therefore one of the primary objects that any serious critical theory of society must analyze.

Part Four examines this engagement comprehensively. We begin with the philosophy of law itself, examining the major jurisprudential traditions and Khan's position in relation to them. We then turn to colonial law and its legacy in Bangladesh, examining the specific forms through which the colonial legal system shaped and continues to shape the social, economic, and political arrangements of the country. We examine the constitutional law of Bangladesh, including Khan's

sustained critique of the 1972 constitution and his vision of what a genuinely post-colonial constitution would look like. We analyze his engagement with criminal law and the question of war crimes, including the International Crimes Tribunal and the war crimes trials that occupied so much of Bangladeshi political life in the 2010s. And we conclude with a broader engagement with the philosophy of human rights, examining the tensions between universalist and particularist approaches to rights and Khan's own position on these questions.

Throughout, we will maintain the connection between the legal analysis and the broader theoretical framework of Parts One through Three, showing how Khan's Lacanian-Marxist perspective and his postcolonial political economy inform and are informed by his engagement with law.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAW: FOUNDATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS

27.1 What Is Law? The Foundational Question

The question "what is law?" is one of the oldest in the history of philosophy, and it remains as contested today as it was in ancient Athens. The answer one gives to this question determines one's entire approach to legal analysis: how one understands the relationship between law and justice, between law and morality, between law and political power, and between law and social change. Khan's position on these foundational jurisprudential questions shapes his analysis of colonial law, constitutional law, and human rights in ways that need to be understood before the specific analyses can be properly appreciated.

The major competing answers to the foundational question can be organized around three broad traditions: legal positivism, natural law theory, and critical legal theory. Each of these traditions represents not just a different answer to the question of what law is but a different vision of what law is for, what values it should serve, and what the relationship between legal analysis and political practice should be.

Legal positivism holds that law is a social fact: it is whatever the relevant social institutions say it is, and its validity as law is independent of its moral content. The great positivist legal philosophers, from Jeremy Bentham through John Austin to H.L.A. Hart and Hans Kelsen, differed in important ways about the specific character of the social facts that constitute law (whether it is the commands of a sovereign, the rules of a legal system, or the norms of a basic norm), but they shared the fundamental commitment to separating the question of what the law is (a factual question) from the question of what the law ought to be (a moral question).

Natural law theory holds, against legal positivism, that there is a higher law, whether divinely ordained, rationally derived, or naturally given, to which positive law must conform if it is to have genuine legal authority. The natural law tradition stretches from Aristotle through Aquinas, Grotius, Locke, and Kant, and it continues in various forms in contemporary legal theory (including the neo-natural law theory of John Finnis and the constitutional rights theory of

Ronald Dworkin). Its central insight is that there are substantive moral constraints on what law can legitimately do, and that a legal system that systematically violates human dignity, equality, or basic rights cannot claim genuine legal authority.

Critical legal theory holds that both legal positivism and natural law theory fail to adequately understand the relationship between law and power. For critical legal theorists, law is not a neutral framework within which different interests compete; it is a mechanism through which dominant social interests are constituted, protected, and reproduced. The specific forms that law takes in any given society are not the result of rational deliberation or moral principle but of historical struggles in which powerful groups have been able to impose their interests in legal form. Understanding law requires understanding these power relations and the ideological functions that law performs in making those relations appear natural, necessary, and just.

27.2 Khan's Jurisprudential Position: Critical Legal Realism

Khan's jurisprudential position is most accurately described as a form of critical legal realism: a position that combines the critical legal theory's insistence on the relationship between law and power with a realist commitment to the analysis of how law actually operates in specific social and historical contexts. This position draws on several intellectual traditions.

From the American Legal Realists of the early twentieth century (including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Karl Llewellyn, and Jerome Frank), Khan takes the insight that law in practice is not the mechanical application of general rules but the exercise of discretion by judges, administrators, and other legal actors whose decisions are shaped by their social positions, their ideological commitments, and the institutional pressures they face. The "law in the books" and the "law in action" are different things, and understanding legal reality requires attention to both.

From the Critical Legal Studies movement that emerged in American law schools in the 1970s and 1980s (associated with scholars like Roberto Unger, Duncan Kennedy, and Morton Horwitz), Khan takes the insight that legal doctrine is fundamentally indeterminate: the same legal principles can be used to support contradictory conclusions, and the specific conclusions that courts reach reflect the ideological commitments of legal actors rather than the logical implications of legal rules. This indeterminacy means that law is always a site of political contestation rather than a neutral framework that stands above politics.

From the postcolonial legal scholarship that has emerged since the 1980s (associated with scholars like Upendra Baxi, Antony Anghie, and Ratna Kapur), Khan takes the insight that law's claim to universality has historically been profoundly compromised by its complicity with colonialism. International law developed alongside colonial conquest and served to legitimate colonial dispossession; domestic colonial law was a mechanism of racial and class domination; and even the liberal legal forms that were supposed to represent universal values were in practice systematically applied in ways that excluded the colonized from the circle of legal subjects.

From the Marxist tradition of legal analysis (from Marx himself through Pashukanis, Gramsci, and Althusser), Khan takes the insight that law is not simply a neutral mechanism for resolving disputes but a form through which the social relations of capitalist production are constituted and

reproduced. The legal form of contract, which appears to embody the equal exchange of equivalents between free and equal subjects, conceals the actual inequality between the worker who must sell his labor power in order to live and the capitalist who buys it on terms that allow the extraction of surplus value. Understanding law requires understanding this relationship between legal form and social content.

27.3 Law and Language: The Semiotic Dimension

One dimension of Khan's approach to law that distinguishes him from most legal scholars, even critical ones, is his attention to the semiotic or linguistic dimension of legal discourse. For Khan, trained in Lacanian theory and deeply engaged with questions of language and signification, law is not just a set of social practices but a specific form of discourse: a way of organizing language that produces specific effects of meaning, authority, and power.

The Lacanian framework is particularly useful here. Law operates through what Lacan would call the Symbolic order: it is a system of signifiers (legal rules, categories, concepts) that organizes social relations through a particular kind of language. The legal subject (the person before the law) is constituted through this symbolic order: legal categories like "citizen," "person," "property owner," "criminal," or "refugee" are not descriptions of pre-existing social realities but constitutive categories that produce the subjects they appear to merely describe.

The performative dimension of legal language, its capacity to create social realities rather than merely to describe them, is one of the most important and most undertheorized aspects of law. When a judge pronounces a sentence, when a legislator enacts a law, when a notary authenticates a contract, these are not simply descriptions of an existing state of affairs; they are speech acts that create new legal realities with real social consequences. Understanding how this performative dimension works, and how it relates to the broader symbolic order within which legal discourse is embedded, is a task that requires the kind of attention to language and signification that Khan's theoretical formation equips him for.

The colonial legal order was, among other things, a specific regime of legal language: a set of categories (race, tribe, religion, property, contract) through which colonial subjects were constituted and colonial social relations were organized. Understanding how these categories worked, and how they continue to work in their postcolonial variants, requires the kind of critical semiotic analysis that Khan's Lacanian framework makes possible.

27.4 Justice Beyond Law: The Gap Between Legal Form and Social Substance

Perhaps the most fundamental jurisprudential insight that runs through Khan's legal analysis is the recognition of the gap between legal form and social substance: the gap between what the law formally provides and what social reality actually delivers. This gap is not a contingent deficiency that could be corrected by better legal drafting or more efficient administration; it is a structural feature of legal systems that operate within societies marked by profound inequalities of power and resources.

The formal equality before the law that liberal legal systems promise is compatible with profound substantive inequality in the social relations that the law regulates. The law treats the billionaire and the beggar as formal equals before its tribunals, but the billionaire can afford the best lawyers, can influence the legislative process through campaign contributions and lobbying, and can use his economic power to reach settlements that the beggar cannot afford to challenge. The formal equality of the legal form conceals a substantive inequality of social power that systematically advantages the rich and disadvantages the poor.

This insight, which has deep roots in the Marxist tradition of legal analysis (it is the kernel of Marx's famous aphorism that the rich and the poor are equally prohibited from sleeping under bridges), is one that Khan applies with particular force to the analysis of colonial and postcolonial law. The colonial legal system offered formal legal equality to colonized subjects while organizing the actual social relations of colonialism in ways that were fundamentally unequal. And the postcolonial legal system has inherited these formal frameworks while failing to transform the substantive social relations that the colonial law organized.

For Khan, achieving genuine justice requires going beyond formal legal reform to address the substantive social conditions under which legal rights can be meaningfully exercised. This is not a rejection of law as a site of struggle; it is an insistence that legal struggle must be situated within a broader political struggle for substantive equality and social transformation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: COLONIAL LAW AND ITS LEGACY

28.1 The Colonial Legal Project: Conquest, Codification, and Control

The British colonial legal project in India was one of the most ambitious and far-reaching exercises in legal engineering in history. Over the course of approximately two centuries (from the establishment of British judicial institutions in Bengal in the late eighteenth century to the transfer of power in 1947), the colonial state created an entirely new legal system: new courts, new codes, new categories of legal subjects, new forms of property, new procedures for dispute resolution, and new mechanisms for enforcing the law. This legal system was simultaneously an instrument of colonial governance and an ideological project that presented colonial rule as the introduction of the rule of law into a society characterized by arbitrary power and traditional superstition.

The ideological dimension of the colonial legal project is crucial for Khan's analysis. The rhetoric of the rule of law was central to the legitimation of British colonial rule: the British presented themselves not as conquerors imposing their will by force but as the bringers of civilization and legal order to a benighted people. This rhetoric concealed the fundamentally coercive character of colonial rule and mystified the economic exploitation that was the real purpose of the colonial enterprise. Understanding how law functioned as ideology in the colonial context is one of Khan's central analytical tasks.

The actual character of colonial law in Bengal was shaped by several key features that Khan examines in detail. First, it was a system of legal pluralism organized around religion: Muslim personal law for Muslims, Hindu personal law for Hindus, and English law for matters not covered by the religious codes. This arrangement, as we discussed in Part One, was not a neutral accommodation of existing diversity but a deliberate policy of divide and rule that hardened communal boundaries and created a legal basis for communal politics. Second, it was a system that protected the property rights of those (zamindars, colonial merchants, British companies) whose property the colonial system had created or consolidated, while offering much weaker protection to those whose traditional access to land and resources the colonial system had disrupted. Third, it was a system that created a vast administrative apparatus with extensive discretionary powers, which in practice meant extensive powers to coerce and discipline those who challenged colonial authority.

28.2 The Indian Penal Code 1860: A Monument of Colonial Legal Engineering

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860, drafted primarily by Thomas Babington Macaulay (who was also the author of the famous 1835 Minute on Indian Education that argued for English as the medium of education in India), is one of the most significant products of the colonial legal project and one that continues to govern criminal law in Bangladesh today. Understanding the IPC, its historical origins, its ideological assumptions, and its relationship to the colonial social order it was designed to regulate, is essential for understanding the colonial legal legacy in contemporary Bangladesh.

Macaulay's IPC was, in important respects, a remarkable achievement of legal draftsmanship. It was clear, systematic, and relatively consistent in ways that the existing patchwork of English, Mughal, and local law that it replaced was not. It offered a unified criminal code applicable to all subjects regardless of their religious or ethnic identity (with some exceptions). And it incorporated elements of the liberal legal theory of Macaulay's time, including the principle of *nullum crimen sine lege* (no crime without a law) and the principle of proportionality in punishment.

But the IPC was also designed to serve the purposes of colonial governance, and these purposes are inscribed in its specific provisions in ways that Khan's critical analysis illuminates. The IPC contained extensive provisions against "sedition" (section 124A) and related offenses that were designed to suppress political opposition to colonial rule. These provisions, which were notoriously used to prosecute Bal Gangadhar Tilak and later Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, have been retained in the post-colonial legal systems of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and have been used by these governments to prosecute political opponents in ways that continue the colonial tradition of using criminal law as an instrument of political suppression.

The IPC also reflected the Victorian moral assumptions of its time, including its provisions against "unnatural offenses" (section 377) that criminalized homosexual conduct, provisions against "obscenity" that were used to regulate cultural and literary expression, and various provisions that encoded assumptions about gender, sexuality, and social order that are deeply problematic from a contemporary perspective. The retention of these provisions in the post-

colonial legal system of Bangladesh (with occasional modifications) illustrates the depth and the persistence of the colonial legal legacy.

28.3 Property Law and the Colonial Constitution of Land Relations

The colonial transformation of property law was one of the most consequential dimensions of the colonial legal project in Bengal. Pre-colonial property relations in Bengal were complex and varied, involving multiple overlapping claims to land (from the state, from landlords, from cultivators, from religious institutions) that were not easily reducible to the simple private property model of English law. The colonial state's project of legal regularization, embodied above all in the Permanent Settlement of 1793 (analyzed in Part Three from the economic perspective), involved transforming these complex property relations into something more recognizable as English-style private property.

The legal mechanism through which this transformation was achieved was the imposition of a specific concept of ownership: the idea that land is owned by a single legal person who has exclusive, alienable, and heritable rights over it, to the exclusion of all other persons. This concept of ownership, which the Permanent Settlement applied to the zamindars, was radically at odds with the existing property relations in which multiple persons and institutions had overlapping claims over the same piece of land. The colonial legal definition of ownership thus dispossessed many persons who had customary claims to land while conferring exclusive ownership on those whose position in the colonial administrative system was most advantageous.

The consequences of this legal transformation of property relations for the subsequent history of Bangladesh cannot be overstated. The creation of a class of large landowners with legally secure private property rights in land, at the expense of the actual cultivators who lost their customary security of tenure, established the basic structure of agrarian class relations that would persist through the colonial period and into the post-colonial era. And the specific legal form of private property that the colonial system imposed, with its assumptions of exclusivity, alienability, and commodification, has shaped the legal framework within which subsequent attempts at agrarian reform (including the land reform programs of the early post-independence period) have had to operate.

28.4 Colonial Evidence Law and the Construction of Truth

One dimension of colonial law that is less often discussed but that Khan finds particularly revealing is the colonial law of evidence: the rules that determine what counts as proof in legal proceedings and how disputes about facts are to be resolved. The Indian Evidence Act of 1872, still operative in Bangladesh, established a specific regime of evidentiary rules that reflected both the general principles of English evidence law and the specific assumptions and needs of colonial governance.

The evidentiary regime established by colonial law reflected a specific epistemology: a theory of what knowledge is and how it is to be validated. This epistemology was not neutral; it privileged certain kinds of evidence (documentary, expert, and eyewitness testimony conforming to specific standards of reliability) over others (oral tradition, customary practice, community memory), in

ways that systematically disadvantaged those whose claims were grounded in non-literate, non-formal, and non-individualized forms of knowledge.

The implications of this evidentiary epistemology for the legal position of the rural poor in colonial Bengal were profound. Disputes over land rights, which were crucial for agrarian communities, were resolved by legal processes that required documentary proof of ownership that most cultivators could not provide (since their rights were grounded in long-standing customary practice rather than formal documentation), while the landlords' rights were supported by the official records of the colonial revenue administration. The colonial law of evidence thus systematically favored those whose claims were supported by colonial documentation over those whose claims were grounded in pre-colonial custom and practice.

This analysis connects to Khan's broader argument about the relationship between knowledge and power. The colonial legal system was not just an instrument of economic exploitation; it was also a specific regime of knowledge production that determined whose knowledge counted as legally valid evidence and whose did not. Transforming this regime of knowledge production is, for Khan, part of the project of genuine decolonization: not just changing who holds political power but transforming the epistemological frameworks through which truth is established and validated in legal and other public contexts.

28.5 The Law of Sedition, Political Repression, and the Colonial State

No dimension of colonial law is more revealing of the fundamentally political character of the colonial legal project than the law of sedition. Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which made it a criminal offense to bring or attempt to bring "into hatred or contempt, or excite or attempt to excite disaffection toward" the Government established by law in British India, was one of the most frequently used instruments of colonial political repression. It was under this provision that Tilak was prosecuted in 1897 and 1908, that Gandhi was prosecuted in 1922, and that numerous other nationalist leaders and journalists were imprisoned for their opposition to colonial rule.

The jurisprudence developed around section 124A reveals the fundamental tension between the liberal legal principles that the colonial state claimed to uphold and the actually authoritarian character of colonial governance. The colonial courts developed an interpretation of sedition that was extraordinarily broad: it was not necessary to prove that the defendant had intended to incite violence or had actually caused any disturbance; it was sufficient to prove that the defendant had expressed criticism of the colonial government that might tend to excite disaffection among the population. On this interpretation, virtually any serious political criticism of colonial governance could be prosecuted as sedition.

Khan's analysis of the sedition law connects to his broader argument about the relationship between law and political power in the colonial context. The colonial state's use of sedition law reveals that the rule of law that colonial rule claimed to introduce was always a selective rule of law: a rule that protected colonial property and colonial authority while criminalizing any political challenge to colonial domination. The continuity between this colonial use of sedition law and the use of similar provisions by post-colonial governments (including the Awami

League government that Khan publicly criticized in 2024) is one of the most disturbing dimensions of the colonial legal legacy.

28.6 The Transfer of Power and the Continuity of Legal Institutions

The formal transfer of power from Britain to the newly independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, and from Pakistan to the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971, did not involve the replacement of the colonial legal system with new legal institutions designed to serve the needs of independent, self-governing peoples. Instead, the colonial legal system was largely retained, with modifications that were more cosmetic than structural. The judges, the lawyers, the courts, the codes, the procedures, and the underlying legal culture all persisted substantially unchanged through the transitions of 1947 and 1971.

This institutional continuity has had profound consequences for the character of the postcolonial legal order in Bangladesh. The courts, the procedures, and the substantive rules of the colonial legal system are oriented toward the needs and assumptions of colonial governance, not toward the needs of a self-governing people committed to equality, dignity, and social justice. The backlog of cases in the Bangladeshi courts (which has reached levels where cases can take decades to resolve), the expense and complexity of legal proceedings that makes effective access to justice available only to the wealthy, the persistent use of colonial-era provisions to suppress political opposition: all of these are consequences of the failure to undertake the genuine legal transformation that decolonization should have involved.

Khan's critique of this legal continuity connects to his broader argument about the "derailed revolution." Just as the political and economic structures of the colonial period were largely reproduced in the post-independence period (with new actors occupying the same structural positions), so the legal system of the colonial period was largely reproduced in the post-independence period, serving the same class interests and performing the same ideological functions under new management.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND THE THEORY OF THE BANGLADESHI STATE

29.1 Constitution-Making as a Revolutionary Act

The drafting of a constitution in the immediate aftermath of independence is one of the most politically significant acts that a new state performs. A constitution is not simply a legal document; it is a founding political act through which a new political community declares itself, establishes the principles on which it will be organized, and creates the institutional framework through which collective self-governance will be exercised. Understanding the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972, including both its achievements and its limitations, requires understanding it as such a founding political act.

The Bangladesh Constitution of 1972 was drafted remarkably quickly: the Constituent Assembly established in January 1972 completed its work by November of the same year, and the constitution came into force on December 16, 1972, exactly one year after the Pakistani military's surrender. This speed reflects the urgency of the political situation: the new state needed a constitutional framework to establish its legitimacy and to organize the machinery of governance. But it also means that the constitution was drafted under conditions that did not allow for the kind of broad deliberative process that might have produced a more genuinely representative founding document.

Khan's analysis of the constitution begins with a recognition of its genuine achievements. The 1972 constitution established a parliamentary system of government based on adult suffrage, with a directly elected parliament (Jatiya Sangsad), an executive government responsible to parliament, and an independent judiciary. It established a comprehensive set of fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, association, assembly, religion, and movement, as well as rights to equality and non-discrimination. And it committed the state to a set of fundamental principles of state policy that went beyond the formal rights framework to include commitments to social equality, education, healthcare, and environmental protection.

These achievements are real, and Khan does not dismiss them. But his analysis identifies a set of fundamental tensions and limitations that have shaped the subsequent development of Bangladeshi constitutional law in ways that have frustrated the revolutionary promise of the Liberation War.

29.2 The Four Pillars and Their Contradictions

The 1972 constitution established four "fundamental principles of state policy" that became known as the "four pillars" of the Bangladeshi state: nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. These four principles were meant to capture the essential character of the new state and to provide the normative framework within which specific policies would be developed.

But Khan's analysis reveals deep tensions between these four principles that the constitution left unresolved and that have generated recurring political conflicts. The tension between nationalism and secularism is particularly acute in the Bangladeshi context. Bengali nationalism, as we have seen, was the primary mobilizing ideology of the Liberation War, and it is a nationalism defined primarily in terms of language and culture. But the large majority of Bengali Muslims understand their cultural identity in ways that are deeply intertwined with their Islamic faith, and a secularism that demands a strict separation between religion and public life is experienced by many as a form of cultural imperialism that denies the religious dimension of their Bengali identity.

The tension between socialism and democracy is another fault line that the 1972 constitution did not resolve. The socialist commitment implies a fundamental transformation of property relations and economic power that would necessarily challenge the interests of the propertied classes. But the democratic process, operating within a society marked by profound economic inequality, tends to produce governments that are captured by the interests of the wealthy rather than by the interests of the majority. Achieving genuine socialism through democratic means requires a level

of popular organization and political consciousness that the post-independence period has not yet produced.

Khan's analysis of these tensions is not simply a critique of the 1972 constitution; it is an analysis of the fundamental contradictions of the postcolonial state. The four pillars that the constitution established are not simply logical inconsistencies in a legal document; they are the expression of real political contradictions in the social formation that produced the Liberation War and that the postcolonial state has had to manage. Understanding these contradictions is essential for understanding the political history of Bangladesh since 1971.

29.3 The Mujib Amendments and the Destruction of Parliamentary Democracy

The political history of the first years of Bangladesh's independence saw the rapid deterioration of the constitutional order established in 1972. The Awami League government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which won the first elections of independent Bangladesh with an overwhelming majority in March 1973, began almost immediately to move away from the democratic and constitutional commitments of the founding moment.

The most significant constitutional intervention of the Mujib period was the Fourth Amendment to the constitution, passed in January 1975, which abolished the parliamentary system and replaced it with a presidential system, established a one-party state under the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), and effectively ended constitutional democracy. This amendment, which concentrated power in the hands of the executive (that is, Mujib himself) and eliminated the institutional checks that might have constrained it, was justified by its proponents as a necessary response to the political instability and economic crisis of the post-independence period.

Khan's analysis of the Fourth Amendment situates it within his broader framework. He sees it not as a response to a genuine emergency but as the expression of the class character of the Awami League: a party that had mobilized mass support through the rhetoric of social revolution but that, once in power, used the state to protect the interests of its own class constituency (the national bourgeoisie, the urban professional classes, the landlord class that had survived the zamindari abolition) rather than to implement the genuine social transformation that the Liberation War had promised.

The Fourth Amendment was also, in Khan's analysis, a betrayal of the democratic and constitutional principles that had been central to the liberation struggle. The Bangladesh Liberation War was fought, among other things, against the authoritarian governance of the Pakistani military state; to establish a one-party authoritarian state in independent Bangladesh was to reproduce in new form the very political arrangements that the liberation struggle had been directed against. This is another dimension of the "derailed revolution" thesis: the political form of post-independence Bangladesh reproduced the authoritarianism of the colonial and Pakistani periods in new ideological clothing.

29.4 Military Coups, Constitutional Manipulation, and the Crisis of Legitimacy

The assassination of Mujib in August 1975 and the subsequent series of military coups and counter-coups that marked the late 1970s and 1980s produced a pattern of constitutional manipulation that has characterized Bangladeshi political life throughout its history. The military governments of Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990) both used constitutional amendments to legitimize their rule and to reorganize the political order in ways that served their specific interests.

The most consequential of these manipulations, from the perspective of Khan's analysis, was the Fifth Amendment to the constitution, passed by Zia's government in 1979. This amendment retrospectively validated all the acts of the military government since the coups of 1975, eliminated the commitment to secularism from the fundamental principles of state policy, and introduced the phrase "Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim" (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) into the preamble of the constitution. The Eighth Amendment of 1988, passed under Ershad, went further by making Islam the state religion of Bangladesh.

These amendments represent, for Khan, a profound constitutional deformation: the subordination of constitutional principle to the short-term political interests of military rulers seeking legitimacy through religious appeal. The elimination of secularism from the constitution's fundamental principles was not just a change in constitutional text; it was a change in the normative framework of the state that opened space for the kind of religiously-justified political mobilization that Khan regards as one of the primary threats to the emancipatory values of the Liberation War.

The Bangladeshi Supreme Court's landmark judgment in the case of *Bangladesh Italian Marble Works Ltd v. Government of Bangladesh* (known as the "Fifth Amendment case"), decided in 2010, which declared the Fifth Amendment unconstitutional and retroactively invalid, is an important moment in constitutional history that Khan has analyzed with great interest. The judgment represented an attempt by the judiciary to use constitutional law as a mechanism for reversing the constitutional deformations of the military period, and it restored several key elements of the 1972 constitution including the commitment to secularism.

But Khan's analysis of the judgment is not simply celebratory. He notes that the judgment was made possible by the political dominance of the Awami League at the time, and that its constitutional reasoning raises important questions about the relationship between judicial review, democratic legitimacy, and constitutional amendment powers. More fundamentally, he argues that legal restoration of the 1972 constitution's text does not resolve the deeper political contradictions that the military amendments expressed: the contested relationship between Bengali nationalism, Islamic identity, and secular politics remains a live issue that cannot be resolved simply by changing the constitutional text.

29.5 The Doctrine of Basic Structure and Constitutional Entrenchment

One of the most important developments in South Asian constitutional law in recent decades is the development and application of the "basic structure doctrine": the judicial principle that certain fundamental features of the constitution (typically including democracy, the separation of powers, and fundamental rights) cannot be abrogated even by constitutional amendment, because

they form the basic structure of the constitutional order that gives the constitution its identity and legitimacy.

The basic structure doctrine was developed by the Indian Supreme Court in the landmark case of *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), and it has subsequently been applied in Bangladesh (where the Supreme Court has held that certain basic structural features of the 1972 constitution cannot be altered even by the constitutional amendment process), Pakistan, and other jurisdictions. The doctrine represents an attempt by the judiciary to protect constitutional essentials against political manipulation, and it has been particularly important in South Asia as a response to the experience of constitutional manipulation by authoritarian governments.

Khan's analysis of the basic structure doctrine is characteristically dialectical. He recognizes its importance as a mechanism for protecting fundamental constitutional values against populist or authoritarian erosion, and he has cited it approvingly in his critique of various constitutional amendments that he regards as incompatible with the essential character of the 1972 constitution. But he is also aware of the democratic difficulties that the doctrine raises: the idea that unelected judges can determine which features of the constitution are so fundamental that they cannot be changed by the democratic process (even through formal constitutional amendment) is in tension with the democratic commitment to popular sovereignty that is itself one of the basic structural features of the constitution.

This tension between constitutionalism (the idea that there are certain constitutional essentials that must be protected against majority will) and democracy (the idea that the people have the right to determine their own governance arrangements through their chosen representatives) is one of the deepest tensions in constitutional theory, and it is one that Khan navigates with characteristic care and nuance.

29.6 The Constitution and Economic Rights: Beyond Formal Political Democracy

One of the most important dimensions of Khan's constitutional analysis is his insistence that genuine constitutional democracy requires not just formal political rights (the right to vote, freedom of expression, association and assembly) but also substantive economic and social rights (the right to adequate food, housing, healthcare, education, and work). This insistence reflects his broader argument that formal political equality is compatible with substantive social inequality, and that a constitution that protects only formal political rights while leaving the social and economic conditions that determine whether those rights can be meaningfully exercised unaddressed is an inadequate constitution from the standpoint of the revolutionary principles of 1971.

The 1972 constitution does include, in its Fundamental Principles of State Policy (Part Two), a set of commitments to social and economic goals: food, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare for all citizens; equal rights and opportunities; participation in the political process; and equitable distribution of wealth and resources. But these commitments are explicitly stated to be "fundamental principles of state policy" rather than "fundamental rights": they are directives to the state rather than enforceable legal rights of citizens, and they cannot be directly enforced by the courts.

This distinction between fundamental rights (which are justiciable and directly enforceable by citizens through the courts) and directive principles of state policy (which are not directly justiciable but are supposed to guide the legislature in framing laws and policies) reflects the influence of the Indian constitutional model, which adopted the same structure from the 1937 Irish Constitution. But Khan questions whether this distinction is adequate to the needs of a genuinely democratic and socially just constitutional order.

His argument is that if the revolutionary promise of the Liberation War was equality, human dignity, and social justice, then these values must be constitutionally guaranteed in a form that is more than merely aspirational. A constitutional order in which the courts can strike down laws that violate freedom of expression but cannot require the state to provide adequate housing, healthcare, or education for its citizens is a constitutional order that protects the rights of the educated and propertied classes more effectively than the rights of the poor and vulnerable majority.

CHAPTER THIRTY: CRIMINAL LAW, WAR CRIMES, AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

30.1 The Theory of Transitional Justice

Transitional justice refers to the set of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms through which societies attempt to deal with the legacies of large-scale human rights violations (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, systematic torture) committed by previous regimes or in the context of armed conflict. The field of transitional justice has developed substantially since the end of the Cold War, as new democracies emerging from periods of authoritarian rule or civil war have grappled with how to address the past while building toward a more democratic and just future.

The major mechanisms of transitional justice include: criminal prosecutions (of individual perpetrators before national or international courts), truth commissions (which investigate and document past violations and often provide a forum for victims to tell their stories), reparations (financial or symbolic compensation for victims and their families), institutional reform (transforming the security forces, the judiciary, and other institutions that were complicit in past violations), and memorialization (creating museums, monuments, and public ceremonies that commemorate victims and ensure that the past is not forgotten).

Khan's engagement with transitional justice in the Bangladesh context is extensive and nuanced, reflecting both his strong commitment to justice for the victims of the Liberation War and his awareness of the political complexities and the principled debates about the proper forms of accountability.

30.2 The International Crimes Tribunal: Establishment, Proceedings, and Controversies

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) established by the Bangladesh government in 2010 was tasked with trying those accused of committing genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes during the Liberation War of 1971. The establishment of the tribunal, nearly forty years after the events it was supposed to address, was itself a major political achievement: it represented the first serious attempt by the Bangladeshi state to address the crimes of 1971 through a formal legal process.

Khan's initial response to the establishment of the ICT was strongly supportive. He argued, consistent with his broader analysis of the Liberation War, that justice for the victims of 1971 was a necessary condition for the realization of the revolutionary promise of the liberation struggle. The failure to hold the perpetrators of the 1971 atrocities accountable had allowed a culture of impunity to persist in Bangladesh, had enabled the political rehabilitation of those who had collaborated with the Pakistani military (most notably through the reinstatement of religion-based political parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, whose leaders had played key roles in organizing the Razakar and Al-Badr paramilitary forces), and had denied victims and their families the recognition and vindication that they deserved.

But as the ICT's proceedings developed, a range of criticisms emerged that Khan has had to engage with. The most serious of these criticisms related to the fairness of the tribunal's procedures: concerns were raised about the independence of the tribunal's judges, about the adequacy of legal representation for the accused, about the standard of evidence applied, about the disclosure of evidence to the defense, and about political interference in the proceedings. These procedural concerns were raised not only by the accused and their political allies but also by international human rights organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Khan's response to these procedural concerns is complex. He acknowledges that serious procedural deficiencies are deeply problematic, both because they undermine the legitimacy of the convictions and because they fail to meet the standards of fair trial that genuine justice requires. But he also situates these criticisms within the broader political context: the international human rights organizations that raised concerns about the ICT's procedures had not been equally vocal about the impunity that had prevailed for forty years, and some of the critics of the tribunal's fairness were motivated by political opposition to accountability rather than by principled concern for fair trial.

This is a characteristically dialectical response: acknowledging the force of the procedural criticisms while refusing to allow them to be used to block accountability entirely. It reflects Khan's broader jurisprudential position: legal processes that fall short of ideal standards are not therefore worthless, and the choice is not between perfect justice and no accountability but between imperfect accountability and the continuation of impunity.

30.3 The Shahbagh Movement and the Politics of Capital Punishment

The Shahbagh Movement of February 2013, which we discussed briefly in Parts One and Two, erupted in response to the ICT's sentencing of Abdul Quader Mollah (a leader of Jamaat-e-Islami convicted of war crimes) to life imprisonment rather than death. The protesters at Shahbagh

Square demanded that the sentence be revised to the death penalty, and the government subsequently amended the International Crimes Tribunal Act to allow for the revision of sentences on appeal by the prosecution (a procedural change that itself raised serious concerns about double jeopardy and ex post facto legislation).

The Shahbagh Movement raises some of the most difficult questions in the philosophy of criminal law, and Khan's engagement with it reflects the complexity of his own position on these questions. The movement's demand for the death penalty is, on the surface, in tension with the principled opposition to capital punishment that has been growing globally and that many progressives (including some of Khan's allies) share. But Khan's analysis refuses the simple progressive response of opposing capital punishment in all contexts.

His argument is contextual and historical: the crimes committed during the Liberation War were of such magnitude and such gravity that the usual arguments against capital punishment (the risk of executing the innocent, the arbitrariness of its application, its failure to deter crime, the state's moral incapacity to take human life) do not straightforwardly apply. The perpetrators of genocide and mass rape have already been tried and convicted by an established tribunal; the question of the appropriate sentence for such crimes is a matter on which societies may legitimately differ, and the demand of the survivors and their families for the ultimate penalty cannot simply be dismissed as retributive excess.

But Khan also recognizes the political instrumentalization of the Shahbagh Movement by the Awami League government, which used the movement's energy to advance its own political agenda (including establishing its secular-nationalist credentials against Jamaat-e-Islami) in ways that went beyond the genuine demands for justice that the movement expressed. His analysis of this instrumentalization illustrates his general suspicion of the relationship between mass movements and political parties: popular energy for genuine justice can be captured and redirected by political actors with different, narrower interests.

30.4 Truth, Reconciliation, and the Limits of Criminal Prosecution

One of the most contested questions in transitional justice theory is whether criminal prosecution is the most appropriate mechanism for addressing large-scale human rights violations, or whether other mechanisms (truth commissions, reparations, institutional reform) might be more effective, more inclusive, or more consistent with the values of a democratic society.

The case for criminal prosecution is strong: it individualizes responsibility (attributing guilt to specific persons rather than to entire communities), it provides a public forum in which evidence is tested and verdicts are rendered according to established procedures, it delivers punishment that expresses society's condemnation of the most serious violations, and it provides victims with a measure of validation and recognition. The Nuremberg and Tokyo trials after World War Two established the principle that even state actors can be held individually responsible for crimes against humanity, a principle that has been further developed by the International Criminal Court.

The case for alternatives to prosecution is also strong: criminal prosecution can re-traumatize victims by requiring them to testify in adversarial proceedings; it may reach only a fraction of those responsible for large-scale violations; it may produce a narrative of accountability that focuses on a few high-level perpetrators while neglecting the broader social conditions that enabled the violations; and it may generate political opposition from those who fear prosecution and thus destabilize fragile political transitions.

Khan's analysis of this debate in the Bangladesh context reflects his broader jurisprudential commitment to substantive justice rather than formal process. He argues that in the specific case of Bangladesh, criminal prosecution was the most appropriate primary mechanism of accountability, because the crimes of 1971 were of such magnitude and the perpetrators had been so successfully rehabilitated politically that a strong signal of condemnation was required. But he also argues that prosecution alone is insufficient: Bangladesh needs also a process of truth-telling that acknowledges the full scope of the 1971 atrocities (including dimensions that are still contested or suppressed in official discourse), a process of reparation for survivors and victims' families, and a process of institutional reform that addresses the conditions that made the atrocities possible.

30.5 Criminal Law and Political Repression in the Postcolonial State

Beyond the specific context of the war crimes trials, Khan's engagement with criminal law addresses the broader question of how the Bangladeshi state has used the criminal law as an instrument of political repression. This is a dimension of his analysis that became particularly urgent in the years before the July 2024 uprising, when the Hasina government used a range of criminal law provisions to silence political opponents, critics, and journalists.

The Digital Security Act (DSA) of 2018 (replaced by the Cyber Security Act in 2023, which retained many of the DSA's most problematic provisions) became, in practice, one of the most significant instruments of political repression in recent Bangladeshi history. The Act criminalized a broad range of online speech, including criticism of the government, on grounds of "negative propaganda" against the Liberation War or its ideals, and was used extensively to arrest journalists, bloggers, political activists, and ordinary citizens who posted critical content on social media. At its peak, hundreds of cases were registered under the DSA per month, creating a climate of pervasive self-censorship.

Khan's critique of the DSA and similar legislation draws directly on his colonial legal analysis: the use of broadly worded criminal provisions to suppress political criticism is precisely the strategy that the colonial government employed through the sedition law, and the continuity between colonial and postcolonial forms of political repression through criminal law is one of the most troubling dimensions of Bangladesh's legal history. The postcolonial state's use of criminal law as a mechanism of political control confirms his analysis of the postcolonial state as reproducing colonial forms of domination in new ideological clothing.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: HUMAN RIGHTS: UNIVERSALISM, PARTICULARITY, AND POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

31.1 The International Human Rights System: Origins and Architecture

The international human rights system that emerged after World War Two, centered on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and subsequently elaborated through a series of international covenants, treaties, and specialized conventions, represents one of the most ambitious attempts in history to establish universal standards for the treatment of human beings by states. The system is premised on the claim that there are certain rights that all human beings possess by virtue of their humanity alone, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other characteristic, and that these rights impose obligations on all states that cannot be evaded by appeal to national sovereignty or cultural particularity.

Khan's engagement with the international human rights system is characteristically dialectical. He is committed to the substantive values that the system expresses: the dignity and equality of all persons, the prohibition of torture and cruel treatment, the rights to political participation and to fair trial, the rights to adequate food, housing, healthcare, and education. But he is also deeply critical of the ways in which the human rights system has been used as an instrument of Western political and cultural hegemony, imposing specific (Western liberal) understandings of rights on non-Western societies under the guise of universal principle.

The key tension in Khan's engagement with human rights is between the universalist aspiration (the claim that there are genuinely universal values that apply to all human beings regardless of culture) and the particularist critique (the claim that any specific formulation of rights reflects the historical and cultural context in which it was developed, and that the claim to universality is itself a form of cultural imperialism). This tension is one of the most fundamental in contemporary political and moral philosophy, and navigating it requires careful philosophical work.

31.2 Talal Asad and the Genealogy of Human Rights

Khan's engagement with Talal Asad, the Syrian-American anthropologist of religion and secular modernity, provides him with some of his most important resources for the critique of Western human rights discourse. Asad's work, particularly his book *Formations of the Secular* (2003) and his subsequent essays collected in *Secular Translations* (2018), offers a genealogical analysis of the concepts of human rights, secularism, and humanitarianism that traces their specific historical origins in the Christian and liberal traditions of Western Europe.

Asad's central argument is that what presents itself as universal secular reason, including the secular human rights discourse that claims to be equally applicable to all cultures and all societies, is in fact a specific historical formation with its own embedded assumptions about the human subject, the proper relationship between religion and politics, the nature of freedom and autonomy, and the appropriate forms of social organization. This does not mean that secular human rights discourse is simply wrong or that it has nothing to offer; it means that its claim to

universality is ideologically suspect and that its application to non-Western societies often involves a form of cultural imperialism dressed in the language of universal reason.

Khan uses Asad's genealogical critique to analyze how Western human rights discourse has been applied in the Bangladesh context. He is particularly interested in the ways in which Western organizations and governments have used human rights language to intervene in Bangladeshi politics in ways that reflect Western geopolitical interests rather than a neutral concern for human rights. The selective application of human rights standards (applying them to governments that are politically inconvenient for Western interests while overlooking violations by governments that are politically aligned) is, for Khan, a demonstration that the supposedly universal human rights discourse is in practice deeply political.

31.3 Rights and Culture: The Universalism-Relativism Debate

The philosophical debate between universalism and cultural relativism in ethics is one of the oldest and most intractable in moral philosophy. The universalist position holds that there are objective moral truths (or at least better and worse moral positions) that apply across cultural boundaries, and that practices that violate fundamental human rights are wrong regardless of whether they are culturally endorsed. The relativist position holds that moral standards are culturally specific, that there are no culture-independent criteria for judging between different moral systems, and that the universalist claim is itself an expression of cultural imperialism.

Khan's position in this debate is neither straightforwardly universalist nor straightforwardly relativist. He is committed to the substantive values of equality, dignity, and social justice in a way that goes beyond mere cultural preference: these are not just the values of one culture among others but the demands of a situation (the situation of exploited, colonized, and oppressed peoples) that transcends any specific cultural particularity. But he is also aware that the specific forms in which these values are expressed and institutionalized are culturally variable, and that imposing a specific (Western liberal) institutional form on non-Western societies in the name of universal values is itself a form of domination.

His resolution of this tension is to distinguish between the substantive values (equality, dignity, social justice) and the specific institutional forms through which those values are expressed. The values are genuinely universal in the sense that they respond to genuinely universal features of the human situation (the universality of suffering, the universality of the need for recognition, the universality of the potential for exploitation and domination). But the institutional forms through which they are expressed must be developed through processes that are sensitive to specific cultural, historical, and social conditions rather than simply imported from outside.

This distinction is philosophically coherent, but it raises practical difficulties: how do we determine which specific practices violate the universal substantive values and which represent legitimate cultural variation in the forms through which those values are expressed? Khan's answer is that this determination cannot be made from outside the culture in question but must emerge from processes of internal critique and democratic deliberation within the culture, aided but not dominated by cross-cultural dialogue.

31.4 Economic and Social Rights: The Question of Justiciability

One of the most contentious issues in international human rights law is the question of economic and social rights: the rights to adequate food, housing, healthcare, education, and social security. These rights are recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, which Bangladesh has ratified, and they reflect the insight that political and civil rights (the right to vote, freedom of speech, the right to fair trial) are of limited practical value if the persons who nominally enjoy them lack the material conditions necessary to exercise them effectively.

But economic and social rights raise specific challenges for legal systems that are accustomed to dealing primarily with negative rights (rights against state interference) rather than positive rights (rights to state provision). The classic objection to the justiciability of economic and social rights is that they require positive action by the state (the provision of housing, healthcare, food, and education), and that courts are not well positioned to make the resource allocation decisions that fulfilling these rights would require. These decisions, the objection goes, should be made through the democratic process rather than through judicial enforcement of constitutional rights.

Khan's response to this objection draws on his substantive commitment to the revolutionary principles of equality and social justice. He argues that the distinction between negative and positive rights is less sharp than it appears: even the negative rights that traditional liberal constitutional law protects require positive state action for their enforcement (courts, police, administrative agencies). And he argues that if the constitution commits the state to the provision of food, housing, healthcare, and education for all citizens (as the Bangladesh constitution's Directive Principles do), then the failure to fulfill these commitments is a constitutional failure that the judiciary has not just the power but the obligation to address.

The Indian Supreme Court's development of a jurisprudence of positive constitutional rights in areas like education (the right to free and compulsory education for children recognized in the *Unnikrishnan* case), food (the ongoing Supreme Court orders in the *People's Union for Civil Liberties* case requiring states to provide school meals and food distribution programs), and shelter (various judgments on the right to shelter) provides a model that Khan has found instructive, even as he recognizes its limitations.

31.5 Minority Rights, Group Rights, and the Limits of Liberal Individualism

One of the most significant tensions in contemporary human rights theory is between the liberal individualism that underpins the traditional conception of rights and the group or collective rights claims of minority communities, indigenous peoples, and other groups whose identity and welfare cannot be fully captured by the framework of individual rights.

Bangladesh is a country with significant religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, including the Hindu minority (approximately eight to nine percent of the population), the Christian minority, and the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (the Jumma peoples, who include groups like the Chakma, Marma, and Tripura). These communities have specific rights claims that the individual rights framework handles imperfectly: the protection of minority cultural

practices, languages, and religious institutions requires collective action and collective rights that are difficult to derive from a framework that recognizes only individual rights-holders.

Khan's analysis of minority rights in Bangladesh is informed by his critique of communalism and his commitment to an inclusive, non-discriminatory political community. He is deeply concerned about the condition of religious minorities in Bangladesh, who have faced recurrent communal violence and who are systematically disadvantaged in access to government employment, education, and economic opportunity. His commitment to the protection of minority rights is not just a principled commitment to universal equality; it is also a politically important statement in the context of a society where communal mobilization against minorities is a recurring political phenomenon.

But Khan's approach to minority rights is also critical of certain versions of multiculturalism that might appear to be sympathetic to minority communities but that in practice reinforce communal boundaries and make inter-community solidarity more difficult. His preferred framework is one in which individual rights (including the right to practice one's religion, speak one's language, and maintain one's cultural traditions) are universally guaranteed, while collective rights claims are addressed through democratic deliberation rather than through the formal legal recognition of group-based entitlements.

31.6 Women's Rights and the Politics of Gender in Constitutional Law

The question of women's rights in Bangladesh occupies a complex and contested terrain in which constitutional principles, religious personal law, social custom, and political calculation are all in play. The Bangladesh constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, but these formal guarantees are in tension with the system of Muslim personal law that governs marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other aspects of family life for the Muslim majority.

Muslim personal law in Bangladesh (as in other countries with significant Muslim populations) is a contested terrain: there are significant internal debates within the Muslim scholarly community about the proper interpretation of Islamic texts on questions of family law, and feminist Muslim scholars have made powerful arguments that the traditional interpretations of Muslim personal law are neither the only possible nor the most authentically Islamic interpretations. The dominant political discourse in Bangladesh has tended to treat the reform of Muslim personal law as a politically sensitive issue that risks communal backlash, and successive governments have been reluctant to undertake the legal reforms that women's rights advocates have demanded.

Khan's engagement with this question is complex. He is committed to gender equality as a value and to the constitutional guarantee of equal treatment regardless of sex. But he is also aware of the political and cultural complexities of reforming personal law in a country where religious identity is closely bound up with family law and where any perceived attack on Islamic practices generates strong political reactions. His approach is to situate the debate about personal law reform within his broader framework of democratic deliberation and inclusive public reason: reform must come through genuine democratic debate that includes the voices of Muslim women

themselves rather than through executive imposition or judicial decree, and the arguments for reform must be made in terms that resonate with Islamic values (of justice, equality, and human dignity) rather than in terms that position Islam as the obstacle to reform.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THE FUTURE OF LAW IN BANGLADESH: DECOLONIZATION, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE

32.1 What Would a Genuinely Postcolonial Legal System Look Like?

Throughout this Part, we have analyzed the colonial legal legacy in Bangladesh and its persistent consequences for the character of the postcolonial legal order. We now turn to the more constructive question: what would a genuinely postcolonial legal system look like? What changes in legal institutions, legal culture, and legal doctrine would be required to create a legal system that genuinely serves the values of equality, dignity, and social justice that Khan identifies as the revolutionary promise of the Liberation War?

This is not a question that Khan has addressed in a single, systematic text; his answer must be assembled from his various essays, lectures, and public interventions. But the outlines of a Khanian vision of legal reform can be constructed from these scattered materials.

The first element of this vision is access to justice: the transformation of the legal system so that its procedures are genuinely accessible to all citizens, not just to those with the resources to engage expensive lawyers and to wait years for cases to be resolved. This requires simplification of procedures, expansion of legal aid, development of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that are appropriate to the needs and resources of ordinary citizens, and a fundamental rethinking of the language and culture of the legal profession that currently makes it a preserve of the educated English-speaking elite.

The second element is vernacularization: the conduct of legal proceedings in Bengali rather than in English. The use of English as the language of the higher courts and of legal practice is, for Khan, one of the most clear expressions of the colonial legal legacy and one of the most effective mechanisms for excluding ordinary citizens from meaningful engagement with the legal system. A genuinely democratic legal system must be a system that people can understand and participate in, and that requires that the language of law be the language of the people.

The third element is substantive constitutionalism: the transformation of the constitution from a formal document that guarantees political rights while leaving social and economic inequality intact to a genuinely substantive document that enforces the social and economic conditions necessary for the meaningful exercise of rights. This requires making the directive principles of state policy justiciable, or at least creating mechanisms through which the state's failure to fulfill them can be effectively challenged.

The fourth element is the decolonization of legal doctrine: a systematic review of inherited colonial legal provisions (including sedition, obscenity, and related provisions) to identify those

that are incompatible with the values of a democratic and self-governing society, and their replacement with provisions that reflect those values. This also involves a rethinking of the fundamental categories of property law, contract law, and family law to assess whether they serve the interests of the majority or only those of the privileged classes.

32.2 Law and Social Movements: The Dialectic of Legal Reform

Khan's vision of legal reform is not a vision of reform from above, imposed by enlightened legislators or judges on an unreformed society. It is a vision of reform generated through the pressure of social movements, of organized collective action by those who are most directly affected by the injustices of the existing legal system.

The history of legal reform is, in Khan's analysis, largely a history of social movements forcing legal change: the abolition of the zamindari system was forced by the peasant movements of the 1940s and 1950s; the women's rights provisions of the constitution were shaped by the feminist movements of the independence period; and the war crimes trials were made possible by the decades of sustained campaigning by survivors and human rights organizations. Law does not reform itself; it is reformed by the political action of those who have interests in its transformation.

This analysis has implications for how legal scholars and lawyers should understand their role. Khan argues for an understanding of the legal profession as having not just a technical but a political function: lawyers who work in public interest litigation, who represent social movements, who analyze and criticize unjust laws, are performing a political function that is as important as the technical function of legal advice and representation. The legal scholar who analyses the colonial dimensions of existing law and argues for its transformation is engaged in a form of political practice, not just academic commentary.

32.3 International Law, Sovereignty, and Postcolonial Justice

The final dimension of Khan's legal analysis that we need to address is his engagement with international law and its relationship to state sovereignty in the postcolonial context. International law is a particularly complex terrain for postcolonial states, because the development of international law (from the *jus gentium* of early modern Europe through the twentieth-century institutions of the United Nations system) has been intimately connected with the history of colonialism and the construction of a world order that served the interests of the colonial powers.

The principle of state sovereignty, which is the foundational principle of the modern international legal order, was developed by European states as a framework for organizing their relations with each other, and it was extended (in severely compromised form) to non-European territories only gradually and incompletely through the process of decolonization. The post-World War Two international legal order, centered on the United Nations, formally recognized the sovereignty and equality of all states, including the newly independent postcolonial states. But this formal equality has coexisted with substantive inequality: the permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China) have veto power

over Security Council decisions, and the international financial institutions (the IMF and World Bank) are governed by voting structures that give decisive weight to the interests of the wealthy countries.

Khan's engagement with international law situates it within his postcolonial political economy: international law, like domestic law, is a terrain in which formal equality coexists with substantive inequality, and in which the apparent universality of legal norms conceals the specific interests of the powerful. This does not mean that international law is worthless or that postcolonial states should simply reject it: the international human rights system, the international criminal law that enabled the Nuremberg trials and the subsequent development of international criminal justice, and the international environmental law that addresses global commons problems like climate change are all genuine achievements of the international legal order that postcolonial states have interests in supporting and strengthening. But it means that engagement with international law must be critical and strategic, aimed at reforming the international legal order to serve the interests of humanity as a whole rather than simply the interests of the powerful.

CONCLUSION TO PART FOUR

Part Four has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the legal dimensions of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We began with his fundamental jurisprudential commitments, identifying his position within the tradition of critical legal realism and tracing the connections between his legal philosophy and his broader theoretical framework. We examined the colonial legal legacy in Bangladesh in detail, analyzing the Indian Penal Code, the property law transformation, the evidence law, and the sedition provisions as specific instances of how colonial law served colonial power. We analyzed the constitutional law of Bangladesh, examining both the genuine achievements and the fundamental tensions of the 1972 constitution, and tracing the subsequent history of constitutional manipulation and reform. We examined the specific legal questions raised by the war crimes trials, engaging with the principles of transitional justice and the tensions between accountability and fair trial. And we concluded with a broader engagement with the philosophy of human rights, examining the tensions between universalism and cultural particularity and Khan's own position on these questions.

Several key themes emerge from this examination. First, the theme of legal continuity: the colonial legal system has been far more persistent in the postcolonial period than formal independence might suggest, and understanding Bangladeshi law requires understanding the colonial legal formations that continue to shape it. Second, the theme of law as ideology: law in Bangladesh, as in other capitalist and postcolonial societies, performs an ideological function, presenting class-specific interests as universal principles and legitimating existing social arrangements through the authority of legal form. Third, the theme of the gap between legal form and social substance: formal legal rights mean little without the substantive social conditions necessary for their meaningful exercise, and a genuinely democratic constitutional order must address both dimensions. And fourth, the theme of law as a site of struggle: despite its ideological functions, law is also a terrain on which oppressed groups can fight for their rights,

and the development of public interest litigation, constitutional rights jurisprudence, and international human rights law has expanded the possibilities for legal challenge to unjust social arrangements.

Part Five of this textbook will turn to what is perhaps the most emotionally and politically charged dimension of Khan's work: his analysis of the Liberation War of 1971, its legacy for Bangladeshi political culture, and the ongoing struggle to fulfill the revolutionary promise of 1971.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART FOUR

Key Legal Concepts and Frameworks

Legal Positivism: The jurisprudential position that law is a social fact, determined by what the relevant social institutions say it is, and that its validity as law is independent of its moral content. Associated with Bentham, Austin, Hart, and Kelsen.

Natural Law Theory: The jurisprudential position that there is a higher law (divine, rational, or natural) to which positive law must conform to have genuine legal authority. An unjust law is, on this view, no law at all. Associated with Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, and Finnis.

Critical Legal Theory: The jurisprudential position that law is not a neutral framework for resolving disputes but a mechanism through which dominant social interests are constituted and reproduced. Associated with the Critical Legal Studies movement, including Roberto Unger and Duncan Kennedy.

The Basic Structure Doctrine: The constitutional principle, developed by the Indian Supreme Court in the *Kesavananda Bharati* case and applied in Bangladesh, that certain fundamental features of the constitution cannot be abrogated even by constitutional amendment.

Transitional Justice: The set of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms through which societies address the legacies of large-scale human rights violations committed by previous regimes or in armed conflict. Includes criminal prosecution, truth commissions, reparations, institutional reform, and memorialization.

The Directive Principles of State Policy: The provisions in the Bangladesh (and Indian) constitution that commit the state to social and economic goals but that are not directly justiciable as individual rights. Their relationship to the justiciable fundamental rights is one of the central tensions in South Asian constitutional law.

Discussion Questions for Part Four

1. Khan argues that the Bangladesh legal system continues to be shaped in fundamental ways by the colonial legal order that it inherited. What are the most significant

dimensions of this colonial legal legacy, and which are most important to address for the project of genuine decolonization? Are there dimensions of the colonial legal legacy that might be worth retaining?

2. The 1972 Bangladesh constitution established four "fundamental principles of state policy": nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. Khan identifies deep tensions between these principles. Do you agree that these tensions are inherent in the constitutional framework, or could they be resolved through appropriate constitutional interpretation? What would a constitutional jurisprudence look like that genuinely honored all four principles?
3. The International Crimes Tribunal established in Bangladesh in 2010 has been criticized for procedural deficiencies that raise concerns about fair trial standards. How should we weigh these procedural concerns against the substantive importance of accountability for the crimes of 1971? Does the justice of the charges affect your assessment of the importance of procedural safeguards?
4. Khan draws on Talal Asad's genealogical critique of secular human rights discourse to argue that international human rights law reflects specifically Western cultural and historical conditions. Does this mean that human rights are not genuinely universal? How can we maintain a commitment to the substantive values of equality and dignity while acknowledging the cultural particularity of specific human rights formulations?
5. Khan advocates for the justiciability of economic and social rights, arguing that the constitution's directive principles should be enforceable by the courts. What are the strongest arguments for and against judicial enforcement of economic and social rights? What institutional arrangements would be needed to make such enforcement effective without creating an undemocratic judicial supremacy?
6. The use of the Digital Security Act by the Hasina government to suppress political criticism and imprison journalists has been widely condemned as incompatible with the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression. How does this use of criminal law relate to the colonial sedition law that Khan analyzes? What institutional reforms would be needed to prevent similar abuses in the future?
7. Khan argues that legal reform in Bangladesh must be generated by social movements rather than imposed from above. What social movements currently active in Bangladesh are most relevant to the project of legal reform? How might the movements for labor rights, women's rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and environmental justice contribute to the legal transformation that Khan envisions?

Extended Reading List for Part Four

On Legal Philosophy and Jurisprudence: H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*; Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*; Roberto Unger, *The Critical Legal Studies Movement*; and for postcolonial legal theory, Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights*, and Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*.

On Colonial Law: Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*; Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*; and Mitra Sharafi, *Law and Identity in Colonial South Asia*.

On Bangladeshi Constitutional Law: Ridwanul Hoque, *Judicial Activism in Bangladesh*; and the Bangladesh Supreme Court's judgments in the Fifth Amendment case and subsequent constitutional litigation.

On Transitional Justice: Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice*; Pablo de Greiff, ed., *The Handbook of Reparations*; and for the Bangladesh-specific context, the documentation produced by International Crimes Strategy Forum and the Muktiyoddha (Liberation War Veteran) organizations.

On Human Rights: Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique*; and the OHCHR's country reports on Bangladesh.

On Women's Rights and Family Law: Naila Kabeer, *The Quest for National Identity*; Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds., *Women and Right-Wing Movements*; and the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association's publications on personal law reform.

End of Part Four

Part Five: The Liberation War of 1971 and the Politics of Memory, Justice, and National Identity will follow.

PART FIVE: THE LIBERATION WAR OF 1971 AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY, JUSTICE, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

PREFACE TO PART FIVE

The Liberation War of 1971 is not, for Salimullah Khan, merely a historical event. It is the founding trauma of Bangladeshi modernity, the wound around which the entire structure of the nation's political and cultural life continues to organize itself, the spectral presence that haunts every argument about democracy, secularism, justice, and the proper character of a sovereign people. To engage with Khan's analysis of 1971 is therefore not to enter a specialist subfield of historical scholarship. It is to engage with the deepest layer of his political philosophy, because the questions raised by 1971, questions about sovereignty and violence, about the legitimacy of armed struggle, about the relationship between nationalism and class, about the politics of memory and the ethics of forgetting, about who gets to define the meaning of a national founding moment and in whose interests that definition is deployed, are precisely the questions that animate everything Khan writes.

Parts One through Four of this textbook have established the frameworks, the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, the postcolonial political economy, and the critical legal philosophy, through which Khan approaches these questions. Part Five applies those frameworks to what is, in many ways,

the central event of Bangladeshi history. We do not do so in the spirit of reducing a complex historical event to a theoretical demonstration. We do so in the spirit of Khan's own method, which insists that theory is most valuable when it illuminates concrete historical and political realities, and that concrete historical realities are most legible when they are approached with the right conceptual tools.

The organization of Part Five is as follows. Chapter Thirty-Three examines Khan's historical analysis of the events of 1971 themselves, engaging with his account of the causes, character, and consequences of the Liberation War. Chapter Thirty-Four examines the politics of memory surrounding 1971, analyzing how different political forces in Bangladesh have contested the meaning and legacy of the war in the decades since independence. Chapter Thirty-Five turns to the question of justice, examining Khan's analysis of the International Crimes Tribunal and the broader question of transitional justice in the Bangladeshi context. Chapter Thirty-Six examines the relationship between the Liberation War and the question of national identity, analyzing how 1971 has functioned in competing projects of Bangladeshi nationalism. Chapter Thirty-Seven examines the Liberation War in regional and global context, situating it within the Cold War, the politics of Indian subcontinent, and the broader history of anti-colonial armed struggles. And Chapter Thirty-Eight undertakes a synthetic analysis, bringing together the strands of the preceding chapters to identify the central lessons that Khan draws from 1971 for his understanding of Bangladeshi democracy, sovereignty, and the future of the left.

Throughout Part Five, we situate Khan's analysis in relation to the most recent scholarship on 1971 and to recent political developments in Bangladesh. The events of 2024 and 2025, which included the mass uprising that ended Sheikh Hasina's government, have given fresh urgency to many of the questions that Khan has been raising for decades, and understanding how those events relate to the unresolved legacies of 1971 is essential for anyone who wants to understand contemporary Bangladesh.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: READING 1971: HISTORY, VIOLENCE, AND THE STRUCTURE OF A NATIONAL FOUNDING

33.1 The Problem of Historical Understanding

History, for Khan, is never a simple accumulation of facts. It is a contested terrain on which different social forces struggle to establish their interpretation of the past in order to legitimate their claims in the present. This insight, which he draws simultaneously from the Marxist tradition of historical materialism and from the broader tradition of critical historiography associated with figures like Walter Benjamin, Hayden White, and the Subaltern Studies collective, shapes everything he writes about the events of 1971.

This does not mean, of course, that all historical interpretations are equally valid, or that the facts of the matter are irrelevant. Khan is not a postmodern relativist who believes that history is merely a narrative constructed in the present for present purposes. He is committed to empirical rigor and to the kind of careful archival and evidential work that serious historical scholarship

requires. But he insists that the selection, arrangement, and interpretation of historical facts are never politically innocent operations, and that the historian's first responsibility is to be transparent about the conceptual and political frameworks that shape their reading of the evidence.

With this methodological point established, we can turn to Khan's reading of the events of 1971 themselves.

33.2 The Historical Background: From 1947 to 1971

To understand 1971, Khan insists, we must understand the twenty-four years of Pakistani statehood that preceded it. The Partition of 1947, which created the state of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, united two geographically separate and culturally distinct regions, West Pakistan (roughly the territory of present-day Pakistan) and East Pakistan (the territory of present-day Bangladesh), under a single national framework. The rationale for this unity was religious: both regions had Muslim majority populations, and the two-nation theory championed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah held that the Muslims of the subcontinent constituted a distinct nation that required its own state.

From the beginning, however, the political and economic relationship between the two wings of Pakistan was deeply unequal. East Pakistan contained the majority of Pakistan's population and was the source of the country's primary export earnings, derived from jute cultivation and processing. West Pakistan, however, dominated the Pakistani state: the central government, the military, the civil service, and the major industrial and financial institutions were all overwhelmingly controlled by West Pakistani elites, primarily from Punjab and the Pashtun regions. The political, economic, and cultural subordination of East Pakistan within the Pakistani state was systematic and comprehensive.

Khan's analysis of this period draws on both the Marxist framework of his political economy and the Lacanian framework of his cultural analysis. At the economic level, he identifies what he calls an internal colonialism: a structural relationship in which East Pakistan functioned as a source of raw material export earnings and as a captive market for West Pakistani manufactured goods, while being systematically denied the political power and the developmental investment that would have allowed it to build its own industrial base. The data are stark: in the 1960s, East Pakistan generated roughly sixty percent of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings from jute exports, while receiving only twenty-five to thirty percent of the central government's development expenditure.

At the cultural and political level, Khan identifies the systematic suppression of Bengali language and culture as a crucial dimension of the East Pakistani experience. The Bengali language movement of 1952, in which students and activists in Dhaka protested against the Pakistani government's attempt to impose Urdu as the sole national language of Pakistan and were fired upon by police, leaving several dead, is for Khan a pivotal moment in modern Bengali and Bangladeshi history. It is the moment when the political and cultural dimensions of East Pakistani subordination fused, when the denial of linguistic rights became the condensation point

for a broader set of grievances about political exclusion, economic exploitation, and cultural denigration.

The Lacanian dimension of Khan's analysis focuses on what we might call the psychic structure of colonial subjecthood within the Pakistani framework. The Pakistani state's insistence that Bengalis were first and foremost Muslims, and that this religious identity should take precedence over and ultimately suppress their Bengali cultural identity, was an attempt to restructure the subject positions of East Pakistanis through the symbolic order of a particular form of Islamic nationalism. The resistance to this restructuring, expressed in the language movement of 1952 and in the subsequent political mobilizations around Bengali cultural rights, was not only a political struggle but a psychic one: a struggle to maintain the integrity of a subjectivity that the state was attempting to reorganize.

33.3 The Electoral Crisis of 1970 and the Decision for War

The immediate trigger for the events of 1971 was the general election of December 1970, which produced a result that the Pakistani state was unwilling to accept. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a landslide victory in the election, securing an outright majority in the national assembly on the basis of its strong support in East Pakistan. Under the principle of parliamentary majority, the Awami League had the right to form the government of Pakistan.

The refusal of the Pakistani military government, under General Yahya Khan, and of the Pakistan Peoples Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which had won the majority of seats in West Pakistan, to transfer power to the Awami League was therefore not merely a political decision. It was a constitutional coup, a decision to override the democratic process in order to prevent the transfer of real political power to the Bengali majority of the Pakistani population. The military government's decision to postpone the convening of the national assembly, announced by Yahya Khan on 1 March 1971, triggered an immediate and massive political response in East Pakistan.

Khan's analysis of this moment focuses on the structural logic of what he calls the impossible situation of Bengali political participation within Pakistan. The Bengalis of East Pakistan had, throughout the history of Pakistani statehood, been systematically excluded from meaningful political power. When they finally exercised their political rights in a free and fair election and won a decisive majority, they were confronted with a state that was simply unwilling to honor the result. This confrontation exposed the fundamental truth of the Pakistani state's relationship to its Bengali subjects: formal political inclusion coexisted with structural exclusion, and when the formal inclusion threatened to produce actual political power, it was revoked.

This structural analysis illuminates a point that is sometimes missed in more narrowly political accounts of 1971: the decision for independence was not primarily a decision made by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or by the Awami League leadership. It emerged from a mass movement that in some respects ran ahead of the Awami League's own leadership. The hartal (general strike) that began on 2 March 1971, the non-cooperation movement declared by Sheikh Mujib on 7 March, and the extraordinary popular mobilization of East Pakistan in the weeks between the postponement of the assembly session and the military crackdown of 25 March were expressions of a popular will that went beyond the formal political positions of the Awami League. Khan,

drawing on the Gramscian concept of organic crisis, characterizes this period as a moment of genuine popular sovereignty in formation: a moment when the normal mechanisms of the state ceased to function and when a kind of dual power emerged, with the Awami League and the mass movement it led exercising a de facto authority that the formal state could no longer contest.

33.4 Operation Searchlight: Genocide, Resistance, and the Character of the War

The military crackdown that began on the night of 25 to 26 March 1971, known by the Pakistani military's own code name as Operation Searchlight, fundamentally transformed the situation. Within hours, the Pakistani military had launched a systematic attack on the Bengali population of Dhaka and other major cities, targeting in particular the Hindu minority communities, Bengali intellectuals, and the student and political activists who had been at the forefront of the mass movement. The attack on the dormitories of the University of Dhaka on the night of 25 March, in which an unknown number of students and faculty were killed, has become one of the most searing symbols of the atrocities of 1971.

The characterization of what happened in East Pakistan between March and December 1971 as genocide is central to Khan's analysis, and it is a characterization that has been the subject of significant political and scholarly controversy. The Pakistani state has consistently denied that what occurred was genocide, characterizing it instead as a military action against armed separatists. A substantial body of scholarship, however, including the work of Rounaq Jahan, who published the first major scholarly analysis of the events in 1972, has documented the systematic character of the violence and its targeting of civilian populations on the basis of their ethnic and religious identity.

Khan's engagement with the question of genocide draws on the legal definition established in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines genocide as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. He argues that the available evidence, including the targeting of Hindu minority populations, the systematic killing of Bengali intellectuals in the days before the Pakistani military's surrender on 16 December 1971, and the pattern of rape used systematically as a weapon of war and social destruction, satisfies the intent requirement of the legal definition.

But Khan's analysis of the violence of 1971 goes beyond the legal question of genocide. He is also interested in the sociological and psychological dimensions of mass violence, and here he draws on Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism and violence, on the sociological work of Jacques Semelin on genocide and mass crime, and on the psychoanalytic framework that he brings to all his cultural analysis. The violence of 1971 was not, he insists, simply the product of the decisions of a few military leaders. It was produced by a specific ideological formation that had dehumanized the Bengali population and that provided the permission structure within which individual soldiers could commit acts of extreme violence.

The role of religious ideology in this dehumanization is a subject on which Khan writes with particular care. The framing of the Bengali movement for autonomy and independence as a Hindu plot and as a threat to Pakistani Islamic identity was central to the ideological preparation

for Operation Searchlight. The Pakistani military's religious advisers, the product of a particular strand of Deobandi Islamic thought that identified Pakistani Islamic nationalism with legitimate political authority, played a role in sanctioning the violence by characterizing Bengali nationalism as tantamount to apostasy. Khan's analysis of this dynamic is important for his broader argument about the relationship between religion and politics, and particularly for his argument that the manipulation of religious identity for political purposes is not a feature of Islam as such but of specific political formations that use religious language to serve their own interests.

The resistance to Operation Searchlight was immediate, widespread, and took forms that Khan finds theoretically significant. The Mukti Bahini (Liberation Forces) that emerged in the months following 25 March 1971 was not a single unified organization but a complex and multifaceted movement that included regular military units (composed largely of Bengali soldiers who had defected from the Pakistani army or police), student guerrilla units, and local armed groups operating in their own areas. The diversity and decentralized character of the resistance is, for Khan, an important feature: it meant that the Liberation War was genuinely a people's war in a sense that goes beyond political sloganism.

Khan draws on the concept of people's war developed in the tradition of revolutionary military theory, from Mao Zedong through Vo Nguyen Giap to the Fanonian analysis of anti-colonial armed struggle, to analyze the character of the Mukti Bahini's resistance. The key insight of this tradition, that guerrilla warfare is most effective when it expresses and is sustained by the active participation of the civilian population, is confirmed by the experience of the Liberation War: the Mukti Bahini depended on civilian networks for food, shelter, intelligence, and recruitment, and the fact that virtually the entire Bengali civilian population was broadly sympathetic to the liberation struggle gave the guerrilla forces a decisive advantage.

33.5 The Role of India: Realpolitik, Regional Interests, and the Question of Liberation

India's intervention in the Liberation War, which began with a formal declaration of war against Pakistan on 3 December 1971 and culminated in the Pakistani military's surrender on 16 December, is a subject of considerable complexity and sensitivity in Khan's analysis. He neither adopts the nationalist tendency to celebrate India as a liberator whose intervention was purely humanitarian and disinterested, nor accepts the Islamist and Pakistani nationalist narrative that India was the primary cause of the war and that the Bengali movement was simply India's instrument.

Khan's analysis of Indian intervention begins with a clear-eyed acknowledgment of India's strategic interests. The creation of an independent Bangladesh, separated from Pakistan, would fundamentally alter the strategic balance of the subcontinent in India's favor: it would eliminate the strategic problem of a hostile state on India's eastern border, encircle Pakistan geographically, and remove from Pakistan the demographic base that gave East Pakistan its majority. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government also faced the massive humanitarian and political problem of the refugee crisis: by the autumn of 1971, an estimated ten million Bengali refugees had crossed into India, placing enormous strain on the economies and social fabrics of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura.

These strategic interests do not, in Khan's analysis, negate the legitimacy of Indian intervention. He makes a distinction that is important in international law and political philosophy: between the subjective motivations of states and the objective justice of the outcomes they produce. India's intervention in 1971 was strategically motivated, but it also put an end to a genocide and made possible the independence of a people who had democratically expressed their will for self-determination. The fact that India acted in its own interests does not mean that the outcome was unjust or that the Indian intervention was wrong.

What Khan insists on, however, is that the independence of Bangladesh was first and foremost the achievement of the Bengali people themselves, and that the tendency in some accounts to present India as the primary agent of liberation is a misrepresentation that serves specific ideological purposes. The Mukti Bahini's resistance over nine months, the enormous sacrifices of ordinary Bengali civilians, the political leadership provided by the Bangladesh government in exile operating from Kolkata, and the international campaign to build awareness of the atrocities being committed in East Pakistan: these were the substance of the liberation struggle, and Indian military intervention, decisive as it was in the final phase, can only be properly understood as an accelerant to a process that the Bengali people had already set in motion.

33.6 The Scale of Destruction and the Question of Numbers

The question of how many people were killed in the Liberation War of 1971 is one of the most politically charged questions in Bangladeshi historical scholarship, and Khan's engagement with it is a good example of his method of combining empirical rigor with political clarity. The Bangladeshi national narrative, institutionalized in official commemorations and schoolbook accounts, holds that three million people were killed. Pakistani sources, and some Western scholars, have argued that this figure is a significant overestimate, with some suggesting numbers in the range of 200,000 to 500,000.

Khan argues that the political character of the numerical debate should not distract from the fundamental moral and historical truth that the violence of 1971 was of an order that constitutes a major atrocity regardless of the precise figures. Whether 300,000 or three million people were killed, the scale and systematic character of the violence against the Bengali population of East Pakistan constitutes what international law would recognize as crimes against humanity and what the evidence strongly suggests was genocide.

At the same time, Khan insists on the importance of careful historical scholarship on the question of numbers, not in order to minimize the atrocity but in order to ground the Bangladeshi nation's understanding of its own history in evidence rather than in politically convenient mythologies. He draws on the methodology of demographic analysis of war mortality developed by historians like Philip Oldenburg and scholars working in the tradition of genocide studies, and he acknowledges that the precise figure remains uncertain and will likely remain so in the absence of comprehensive archival research.

This combination of moral clarity and epistemic humility is characteristic of Khan's historical method at its best. He refuses both the nationalist impulse to treat the three million figure as a

sacred truth that cannot be questioned and the cynical or politically motivated impulse to use numerical uncertainty as a basis for minimizing the scale of the atrocity.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: CONTESTED LEGACIES OF A FOUNDATIONAL EVENT

34.1 Memory, Power, and the Production of National History

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur argued in his work on memory, history, and forgetting that memory is never simply a passive registration of the past but always an active construction shaped by present concerns, power relations, and the frameworks through which we make sense of experience. This insight, developed through Ricoeur's engagement with Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness, Freud's theory of repression, and the broader tradition of historiographical reflection, provides an important theoretical frame for understanding the politics of memory around 1971 in Bangladesh.

Khan draws on Ricoeur but also on Walter Benjamin's famous image of the Angel of History, the figure from Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* that Benjamin used in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" to describe the relationship between past and present. Benjamin's angel, blown forward into the future by the storm of progress while looking backward at the wreckage of the past, is a figure for the relationship between living in the present and being responsible to the demands of history. For Khan, the proper response to 1971 is not to treat it as a settled historical fact but to engage with it as an unfinished demand: the demand of those who died for a justice and a social transformation that have not yet been achieved.

This Benjaminian frame allows Khan to distinguish between two fundamentally different modes of engaging with the memory of 1971. The first is what he calls the commemoration mode: treating 1971 as a source of national pride and legitimacy, holding annual ceremonies, building memorials, printing commemorative stamps, and producing official narratives that celebrate the liberation while carefully managing and containing the political energies it generates. The second is what he calls the liberation mode: treating 1971 as an ongoing demand, insisting that the social transformation that the liberation struggle promised has not yet been achieved and that the proper way to honor the dead of 1971 is to continue the struggle for the social justice they died for.

The conflict between these two modes of engaging with 1971 has been one of the central conflicts in Bangladeshi political culture since independence, and Khan's analysis of this conflict is one of the most illuminating dimensions of his political thought.

34.2 The Awami League and the Politics of Commemoration

The Awami League, as the party that led the independence movement and that has governed Bangladesh for most of its post-independence history, has had the greatest power to shape the official memory of 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the "Father of the Nation" whose image

appears on Bangladeshi currency and whose birthday and assassination anniversary are national holidays, is at the center of the Awami League's memorial politics.

Khan's analysis of Awami League memorial politics is nuanced and deliberately uncomfortable for those who expect a straightforward critique. He acknowledges the genuine historical role of Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League in the independence movement. He acknowledges that the Awami League's commitment to the secular and democratic principles of the 1972 constitution, however imperfectly honored in practice, represents a genuine political position that is preferable to the Islamist nationalism championed by its opponents. And he acknowledges that the politics of commemoration serves important social functions, including the maintenance of national solidarity and the transmission of a sense of historical identity to younger generations.

But he is unsparing in his analysis of the ways in which Awami League memorial politics has been used to serve the party's own political interests rather than the genuine demands of history. The transformation of national commemoration into a form of political monopoly, in which the Awami League presents itself as the exclusive custodian of the liberation heritage and brands all its political opponents as enemies of liberation, is for Khan a distortion of the historical truth. The Liberation War was the achievement of the entire Bengali people, across all social classes and political affiliations, and any party that claims exclusive ownership of that achievement is making a historically false and politically dangerous claim.

Particularly important in Khan's analysis is his critique of the Awami League's systematic suppression of the role of left-wing forces in the liberation struggle. The National Awami Party (NAP), the student organizations affiliated with the left, and the various communist and socialist groupings that participated in the armed resistance played significant roles in the Liberation War that have been systematically marginalized in the official narrative. This marginalization serves a clear ideological purpose: it allows the Awami League to present the liberation struggle as a purely nationalist, rather than social revolutionary, movement, and to claim that the demands of liberation have been satisfied by independence rather than insisting on the social and economic transformation that the left forces were fighting for.

Khan also analyzes the specific uses of Mujib commemoration in Bangladeshi political life, particularly the elevation of Mujib to what he describes as a quasi-theological status under Sheikh Hasina's government. The proliferation of Mujib's image on public buildings, the mandatory celebration of his hundredth birthday as "Mujib Year" in 2020-2021, and the legal prohibitions on criticism of Mujib and his family represent, for Khan, a politically dangerous conflation of the national father figure with the ruling party's claim to permanent legitimacy. Drawing on the Lacanian concept of the Name of the Father as a structural function within the symbolic order, Khan argues that the instrumentalization of Mujib's legacy has transformed a genuine historical figure into an empty ideological signifier that functions primarily to legitimize the Awami League's hold on power.

34.3 The Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Counter-Memory of 1971

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), founded by General Ziaur Rahman (commonly known as Zia) in 1978, has consistently challenged the Awami League's version of the liberation

heritage and has promoted an alternative reading of 1971 that emphasizes different aspects of the historical record and serves different political purposes.

The most significant point of historical contention concerns the declaration of independence. The Awami League and its supporters hold that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, through his famous speech of 7 March 1971 and his subsequent political leadership, was the sole and authentic author of Bangladeshi independence, and that any alternative account is a distortion motivated by political rivalry. The BNP and its supporters point to the fact that Mujibur Rahman was arrested by the Pakistani military on the night of 25 March and spent the entire liberation struggle as a prisoner in West Pakistan, and argue that the actual conduct of the war required other leadership. They highlight the role of General Ziaur Rahman, who broadcast a proclamation of independence from the Kalurghat radio station in Chittagong on 27 March 1971, as a claim to legitimate historical standing that the Awami League systematically suppresses.

Khan's analysis of this controversy refuses the simple resolution that either side tends to prefer. He acknowledges that both the historical role of Sheikh Mujib and the historical role of the military leaders, including Zia, who actually commanded the liberation struggle require honest historical assessment. But he insists that both sides have instrumentalized the historical record in ways that serve present political purposes rather than historical understanding.

More important for Khan's broader analysis is the BNP's engagement with the question of Islam and Bengali identity. Zia's reconstitution of Bangladeshi national identity around the concept of "Bangladeshi" rather than "Bengali" nationalism, and his restoration of "Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim" (In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate) to the constitution and his insertion of "Trust and faith in Almighty Allah" as a constitutional principle, represented a fundamental reconfiguration of the symbolic order of Bangladeshi national identity. Where the 1972 constitution had established a secular democratic republic, Zia's amendments introduced an Islamic identity into the constitutional framework that altered the basic character of the state.

Khan analyzes this reconfiguration through both his political economy and his Lacanian framework. At the political-economic level, the shift toward Islamic identity served specific class interests: it allowed the BNP to build alliances with the Islamist parties, particularly Jamaat-e-Islami, that had collaborated with the Pakistani military in 1971 and that had strong organizational networks, financial resources tied to Gulf remittances, and political influence in rural communities. At the Lacanian level, the invocation of Islamic identity addressed a genuine psychic need among sections of the Bangladeshi population for whom the pure secular nationalism of the 1972 constitution felt culturally alien or insufficiently attentive to the Muslim cultural identity that was a significant part of their subjectivity.

34.4 Jamaat-e-Islami and the Problem of Collaboration

The role of Jamaat-e-Islami and its affiliated organizations in the Liberation War is perhaps the most painful and politically charged dimension of the memory politics of 1971. Jamaat-e-Islami, as a party that had opposed both the creation of Pakistan (which it viewed as a nationalist rather than Islamic project) and the liberation of Bangladesh (which it viewed as a Hindu-Indian conspiracy against Muslim unity), mobilized its members in support of the Pakistani military

during the Liberation War. The Razakar, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams auxiliary militias, drawn largely from Jamaat cadres, participated directly in the killings, rapes, and looting that accompanied the Pakistani military's operations.

Khan's analysis of Jamaat-e-Islami is historically careful and theoretically rich. He traces the organization's origins in the thought of Mawdudi (Abul Ala Maududi), the Pakistani Islamic scholar who developed the concept of an Islamic state governed by divine sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*) as a comprehensive alternative to both liberal democracy and socialist secularism. Mawdudi's political theology, which Khan engages through his broader analysis of Islam and political modernity, is a systematic attempt to derive an entire political, economic, and social order from a particular interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. Khan argues that this project, whatever its internal theological coherence, functions in practice as an ideological system that serves specific class and political interests, and that its invocation of divine authority is a political maneuver rather than a genuine expression of Islamic spiritual practice.

The collaboration of Jamaat and its affiliates with the Pakistani military was, in Khan's analysis, the logical consequence of this political theology's identification of Muslim political unity (and specifically the unity of the Pakistani state) with divine will, and its consequent characterization of Bengali nationalism as a threat to Islam. The willingness of Jamaat cadres to participate in mass violence against Bengali civilians, including Bengali Muslims, reveals, for Khan, the bankruptcy of a political theology that claims to speak for the universal community of Muslims but functions in practice as a vehicle for specific political and class interests.

The rehabilitation of Jamaat-e-Islami as a legitimate political actor in Bangladeshi politics, which occurred under Zia's government and continued under subsequent BNP and caretaker governments, is for Khan a profound injustice that reveals the fundamental incompleteness of Bangladesh's post-independence political reckoning with 1971. His analysis of this rehabilitation draws on the comparative literature on transitional justice and on the specific Bangladeshi experience to argue that the failure to hold collaborators accountable in the years immediately after 1971 created a political space in which those who had committed crimes against the Bengali people were able to rebuild their organizations, accumulate wealth, and eventually participate in national governments as coalition partners.

34.5 The July 2024 Uprising and the Memory of 1971

The mass uprising of July and August 2024, which began as a student protest against the quota system for government jobs and escalated into a nationwide movement that ultimately forced Sheikh Hasina's resignation and flight from the country, has significant implications for the politics of memory around 1971 that Khan has analyzed extensively. His analysis of these events, delivered in several lectures and essays in 2024 and 2025, draws explicitly on the conceptual frameworks he has developed over decades of engagement with the history and legacy of 1971.

Khan's reading of the July uprising identifies it as a moment of rupture in the hegemonic structure of Bangladeshi political culture. The quota system that triggered the protests was specifically the quota reserved for descendants of Liberation War veterans (*muktijoddha*), a

policy that had been introduced with genuinely progressive intent but that over time had become a mechanism for the reproduction of Awami League political networks and for the exclusion of young people from outside those networks from positions in the state apparatus. The student protesters' demand for reform or abolition of the quota was, at one level, a demand for meritocratic fairness, but at another level it was a challenge to the Awami League's monopoly on the liberation heritage: a refusal to accept that descent from liberation war veterans conferred a permanent entitlement to preferential treatment in the present.

Khan interprets this as precisely the kind of rupture that occurs when the gap between the symbolic order's official claims (that Bangladesh is a democratic republic that honors the legacy of 1971 through its institutions) and the lived experience of the population (of exclusion, corruption, police violence, and the systematic closure of political and economic opportunities for those outside the ruling party's networks) becomes too wide to sustain. The uprising, in his Lacanian-Marxist framework, can be read as an irruption of the Real: a moment when the contradictions that the symbolic order had been managing and suppressing erupted in a form that the hegemonic system could no longer contain.

Particularly important for Khan's analysis is the role of young people in the uprising, and specifically the disconnect between these young people and the memory of 1971. Many of the student protesters were born in the 1990s and 2000s, for whom 1971 is not a lived memory or a formative experience but a historical event known primarily through official commemorations, school textbooks, and political rhetoric. The Awami League's attempt to delegitimize the uprising by branding the protesters as enemies of the liberation heritage, using the language and the iconography of 1971 against a movement that was in many respects the most genuinely popular uprising since the liberation movement itself, was for Khan a revealing moment of ideological overreach that exposed the bankruptcy of the Awami League's monopolization of the liberation legacy.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE: WAR CRIMES, TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, AND THE LIMITS OF LAW

35.1 Accountability Deferred: The Long Shadow of Impunity

The question of accountability for the crimes of 1971 was not addressed in the immediate aftermath of independence. The Simla Agreement of 1972 between India and Pakistan, negotiated in the context of the broader normalization of India-Pakistan relations following the war, included provisions that effectively removed the possibility of trying Pakistani prisoners of war (including those involved in the atrocities of 1971) before international or Bangladeshi tribunals. The approximately 195 Pakistani military officers whose extradition had been sought by Bangladesh for trial on charges of war crimes were returned to Pakistan without trial as part of the Simla Agreement's framework of prisoner exchange and repatriation.

This outcome was a devastating blow to the victims of 1971 and to those who had expected that independence would bring justice. Khan's analysis of the failure of accountability in this period

draws on the concept of political expediency as the enemy of justice, a theme that runs through the comparative literature on transitional justice from Nuremberg to South Africa. The decision to prioritize diplomatic normalization over accountability was made by governments (primarily the Indian government, but with the acquiescence of the Bangladeshi government under Sheikh Mujib) that had strong political interests in a stable post-war settlement, and those political interests overrode the demands of justice.

At the domestic level, the situation was not much better. Sheikh Mujib's government had established a Collaborators Tribunal in 1972 to try those who had collaborated with the Pakistani military, and approximately 37,000 people were detained under the Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order. But the process was deeply problematic from a procedural standpoint, and it was eventually abandoned: in 1973, Sheikh Mujib's government issued a general amnesty that released the vast majority of detainees, citing the need for national reconciliation and the desire to move forward rather than backward.

Khan is deeply critical of this amnesty, though his critique is more structurally than individually directed. The amnesty was not, he argues, primarily a decision about justice or reconciliation: it was a political calculation made by a government that was increasingly beleaguered, that was struggling to manage the immense challenges of post-war reconstruction, and that judged that the maintenance of political stability required sacrificing the demands of justice. This calculation may have been understandable given the circumstances, but it had consequences that played out over the following decades: the organizations and networks of collaboration were allowed to reconstitute themselves, and the beneficiaries of impunity became increasingly important actors in Bangladeshi political life.

35.2 The International Crimes Tribunal: Justice Finally Delivered, or Justice Compromised?

The establishment of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) by Sheikh Hasina's government in 2010, thirty-nine years after the Liberation War, gave Khan a specific institutional object on which to focus his analysis of transitional justice. He has engaged with the ICT extensively, and his analysis is characteristically complex: he supports the fundamental project of accountability while being deeply critical of specific aspects of the tribunal's operation.

The ICT was established under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973, which had been enacted under Sheikh Mujib but never used. Its mandate was to try individuals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed during the Liberation War. Its first trials focused on leading figures in Jamaat-e-Islami, including Delawar Hossain Sayeedi, Ghulam Azam, and Motiur Rahman Nizami, who had held positions in Jamaat's leadership structure in 1971 and were alleged to have organized or participated in the auxiliary militias.

Khan's analysis of the ICT begins with a strong affirmation of the principle that accountability for mass atrocity is both a legal obligation under international law and a moral necessity for societies that hope to move beyond their histories of violence. He argues against those who contend that after thirty-nine years the pursuit of justice is counterproductive, pointing to the

experience of countries like Chile, Argentina, and Rwanda where delayed justice, whatever its limitations, proved preferable to impunity in both moral and political terms.

But his analysis also identifies serious problems with the ICT as actually constituted and operated. The most significant concern is procedural: the ICT operated under a statutory framework that deviated in important ways from international fair trial standards. The Act did not provide for the right of the accused to confront prosecution witnesses in real time, created evidentiary rules that made it easier to admit hearsay evidence than would be permissible in international criminal tribunals, and imposed limitations on the defense's ability to gather and present evidence. The tribunal's composition, drawn exclusively from the Bangladeshi judiciary without international participation, raised questions about independence and impartiality, particularly given the openly political character of the prosecutions and the fact that the accused were all associated with the main opposition political parties.

Khan places these procedural concerns in their broader political context. The Hasina government's prosecution of Jamaat-e-Islami leaders served dual purposes: it addressed a genuine historical injustice, but it also served the government's immediate political interest in weakening and delegitimizing its main political opponents. The timing of the trials, in the run-up to the 2014 elections, and the fact that all the defendants were associated with parties that formed the main political opposition to the Awami League, created reasonable grounds for concern that justice was being selectively applied for political purposes.

The Shahbag protests of 2013, in which hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Dhaka to demand the death penalty for convicted war criminals, add another layer of complexity to Khan's analysis. He reads the Shahbag movement as a genuine expression of popular demand for justice that had been deferred for forty years, and he is sympathetic to the anger and sense of historical injustice that animated it. But he is also concerned about the dynamics that the protests set in motion: the atmosphere of mass mobilization demanding specific trial outcomes is difficult to reconcile with the requirements of due process, and the government's responsiveness to the protests in amending the ICT Act to remove an acquittal for one of the accused raised serious questions about the tribunal's independence.

35.3 The Theory of Transitional Justice: A Critical Engagement

Khan's engagement with the ICT is part of a broader critical engagement with the theory and practice of transitional justice that has developed as an academic field since the early 1990s. He draws on the foundational scholarship in this field, including Ruti Teitel's genealogical analysis of transitional justice, Pablo de Greiff's systematic examination of reparations, and Priscilla Hayner's comparative study of truth commissions, but he approaches this scholarship with the critical distance of a scholar trained in Marxist political economy and postcolonial theory.

His most fundamental critique of mainstream transitional justice theory is that it tends to address the symptoms of political violence without addressing its structural causes. Truth commissions and criminal trials can establish individual accountability and create a historical record, but they cannot address the social and economic structures that made mass violence possible and that continue to generate conditions of injustice in the post-transitional period. A society that convicts

a few leaders of past atrocities while leaving the class structures, the patterns of resource distribution, and the institutional arrangements that enabled those atrocities unchanged has achieved only partial justice.

This critique draws on the broader Marxist tradition of analyzing formal legal proceedings as modes of ideological legitimation. The criminal trial, with its focus on individual responsibility and its performance of procedural neutrality, performs a social function that goes beyond the determination of guilt or innocence: it constructs a narrative in which social evil is the product of individual malice rather than structural conditions, and in which the restoration of the normal social order (following a period of exceptional violence) is achievable through legal proceedings rather than social transformation.

Khan does not, however, use this structural critique to dismiss the importance of individual accountability. He explicitly rejects the position that because mass violence has structural causes, individual perpetrators bear no personal responsibility for their actions. His engagement with Hannah Arendt's analysis of the Eichmann trial, and particularly with her concept of the "banality of evil," informs his understanding of how ordinary bureaucratic and organizational structures enable and normalize participation in mass violence. Arendt's point that Eichmann was neither a monster nor an ideologue but an ordinary functionary who had ceased to think is, for Khan, an insight into the social psychology of collaboration that helps explain how large numbers of otherwise ordinary people were able to participate in the violence of 1971.

35.4 The Demands of the Dead: Memory, Reparation, and the Future

The Benjaminian dimension of Khan's approach to 1971 finds its clearest expression in his thinking about what the dead demand of the living. Benjamin's concept of the "weak messianic power" possessed by each generation, a responsibility to the unrealized possibilities of the past, provides Khan with a framework for thinking about the relationship between the liberation struggle and the ongoing political obligations of Bangladeshi citizens.

For Khan, the liberation struggle of 1971 was not only a struggle for independence from Pakistan. It was a struggle for a particular kind of society: a society characterized by what he calls the three fundamental principles of the liberation promise, by popular sovereignty (expressed in the electoral mandate of 1970 that the Pakistani state refused to honor), by social justice (expressed in the Awami League's six-point program and more radically in the demands of the left forces within the liberation movement), and by cultural dignity (expressed in the language movement and the broader assertion of Bengali cultural identity against the homogenizing force of Pakistani Islamic nationalism).

The task of honoring the demands of the dead is therefore not simply a matter of building memorials and holding ceremonies. It is a matter of continuing the political work of realizing the social transformation that the liberation struggle promised. And this means addressing, honestly and directly, the extent to which that promise has and has not been fulfilled in the five decades since independence.

Khan's assessment of this question is characteristically clear-eyed. Independence was achieved, and that is an extraordinary achievement that should not be minimized. The establishment of a Bengali-speaking nation-state, with its own institutions, its own cultural life, and its own political processes, represents the fulfillment of the most basic aspiration of the liberation struggle. But the social and economic transformation that the left forces within the liberation movement fought for has not been achieved. Bangladesh remains a society of profound inequality, with an extremely wealthy elite, a growing middle class, and a vast poor majority whose access to the basic goods of social life, education, healthcare, secure employment, and political voice, remains deeply inadequate.

The gap between the liberation promise and the post-liberation reality is, for Khan, the central political fact of Bangladeshi history since 1971, and it is the gap that the politics of memory around 1971 has consistently been called upon to manage and contain.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: BENGALI, BANGLADESHI, AND MUSLIM

36.1 The Tripartite Structure of Bangladeshi Identity

One of the most persistent and politically consequential debates in Bangladeshi intellectual and political life concerns the proper understanding of the country's national identity. At the heart of this debate is a tripartite tension among three identity frameworks, each of which captures something genuine about the character of Bangladeshi national life and each of which has been mobilized in different political projects with profoundly different implications.

The first framework is Bengali cultural nationalism: the identification of Bangladeshi national identity with the Bengali language, the Bengali literary and cultural tradition, and the historical experience of the Bengali people across both Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. This framework has deep roots in the nineteenth-century Bengali Renaissance and in the language movement of 1952, and it finds its most powerful political expression in the liberation struggle of 1971 and the secular democratic constitution of 1972.

The second framework is what might be called Muslim majority nationalism: the identification of Bangladeshi national identity with the country's Muslim majority cultural and religious heritage, in ways that differentiate Bangladesh from Hindu-majority India and that connect it to the broader community of Muslim-majority nations. This framework was articulated, in different ways, by both the Pakistani state (in its attempt to subordinate Bengali identity to Pakistani Islamic nationalism) and by the BNP's concept of "Bangladeshi" nationalism (which distinguished Bangladeshi identity from the Bengali identity shared with Hindu Bengalis in India).

The third framework is what Khan calls the subaltern democratic nationalism: the identification of Bangladeshi national identity not with ethnic or religious markers but with the political aspirations of the poor and dispossessed majority of the population. This framework is most

explicitly articulated in the left political tradition, but it has also found expression in various populist political movements, including aspects of Sheikh Mujib's own political practice in the liberation period, before his consolidation of power under the one-party BAKSAL system in 1975.

Khan's analysis of these three frameworks is one of the most sophisticated aspects of his political thought. He refuses to simply identify with one framework and dismiss the others, because each captures something real about the complex historical formation of Bangladeshi identity, and a political project that ignores any one of them will be unable to mobilize the full range of Bangladeshi social energy that genuine transformation requires.

36.2 The Language Question and the Politics of Cultural Identity

The centrality of language to Khan's politics and his intellectual project makes the language question in Bangladesh a particularly important site for understanding his thought. We have already noted, in Part One and Part Two, his fierce advocacy for Bengali as the medium of higher education and his critique of what he calls the colonial cringe that leads educated Bangladeshis to prefer English over their mother tongue. Here we want to examine the political philosophy that underlies this advocacy and its relationship to the broader question of national identity.

Khan's thinking on language draws on several traditions that converge in ways that are distinctly his own. From Wilhelm von Humboldt and the German Romantic tradition, he takes the idea that language is not merely a medium of communication but a medium of thought and world-formation: that the specific language a people speaks shapes the specific forms of consciousness, cultural memory, and social solidarity that characterize their way of being in the world. From Walter Benjamin, he takes a more mystical version of this insight: the idea that each language carries within it a specific way of naming the world that is irreducible to any other language, and that translation always involves a loss that cannot be fully recovered. From Fanon, he takes the political version of the same insight: the idea that colonial domination was in significant part achieved through the imposition of the colonizer's language, and that decolonization requires not just political independence but cultural and linguistic recovery.

For Khan, the privileging of English over Bengali in Bangladeshi higher education is not simply a practical preference for an internationally useful language. It is a symptom of what he calls the colonized mind: the internalization of the colonial hierarchy of languages and cultures that leads the educated classes of postcolonial societies to regard their own mother tongues as inadequate vehicles for serious thought and to aspire to the cultural standards set by the former colonial power. This colonized mentality perpetuates, in the cultural domain, the same hierarchy of center and periphery that characterizes the global political economy in the material domain.

The political consequences of language policy are, in Khan's analysis, also deeply connected to the question of class. The maintenance of English as the language of higher education and professional life in Bangladesh creates a structural barrier that systematically advantages those who have access to English-medium education, primarily the urban upper and middle classes, and systematically disadvantages those whose education has been in Bengali, primarily the rural

and urban poor majority. The language hierarchy is thus not merely a cultural question but a class question, and a language policy that privileges English perpetuates and deepens existing class inequalities.

Khan's advocacy for Bengali is not, importantly, a simple cultural conservatism or an uncritical celebration of everything Bengali. He is highly critical of aspects of Bengali literary culture that he sees as elitist, sentimentalized, or insufficiently engaged with the realities of contemporary political and intellectual life. His engagement with the Bengali literary tradition is selective and critical: he celebrates those aspects of it that he sees as genuinely progressive, politically engaged, and intellectually serious, and he is sharply dismissive of what he sees as aestheticism or cultural nostalgia.

36.3 Islam, Secularism, and the Problem of Religious Identity

The relationship between Islam and Bangladeshi national identity is one of the most complex and politically fraught questions in Khan's entire body of work. His position on this question has been consistently misrepresented, both by those who accuse him of being a covert Islamist because he refuses to adopt the simple anti-religious secularism of much liberal discourse, and by those who accuse him of being a hidden secularist or a de facto Hindu nationalist because he insists on the legitimacy of a secular constitutional order.

Khan's actual position is more subtle and more analytically interesting than either caricature allows. He begins from a historical observation: that the vast majority of Bangladeshi people are Muslim, and that Islam is not merely a formal religious identity but a living cultural practice that shapes the everyday life, moral vocabulary, aesthetic sensibility, and social solidarity of most of the population. Any political project that dismisses or denigrates this identity, that treats Islam as simply an obstacle to modernity or as a mask for backwardness, will fail to engage with the actual human beings who inhabit Bangladeshi society.

At the same time, Khan is unsparing in his critique of what he calls political Islam or Islamism: the use of Islamic religious rhetoric and Islamic organizational forms for specifically political purposes, purposes that he analyzes as serving particular class interests rather than genuine religious or spiritual values. His analysis of Jamaat-e-Islami, of the Hefazat-e-Islam movement, and of the broader phenomenon of Islamic political mobilization in Bangladesh consistently shows how these formations exploit the genuine religious sentiments of the population in service of political projects that are ultimately about power, class interest, and the reproduction of specific social hierarchies.

The theoretical resources that Khan draws on for this analysis include, most importantly, his reading of the Bengali reformist Islamic tradition, and particularly the thought of Ismail Hossain Siraji and the broader tradition of progressive Islamic thought in Bengal, which insisted on distinguishing between genuine spiritual practice and political manipulation of religious identity. He also draws on the comparative sociology of religion, including Max Weber's analysis of the "elective affinity" between religious doctrines and social classes, to show how different interpretations of Islam come to serve different social interests.

Khan's secularism is therefore not the "laicite" model derived from the French tradition, which demands the removal of religion from public life altogether. It is closer to what the political philosopher Rajeev Bhargava has called "principled distance": a constitutional order that maintains equal respect for all religious communities, that does not favor any one religion, that protects religious freedom and practice, but that insists that the state's legitimacy and law derive from the consent of the governed rather than from divine authority.

This position allows Khan to simultaneously defend the secular character of the Bangladeshi constitution, critique the Islamist manipulation of religious identity for political purposes, and respect the genuine religious life and cultural identity of the Muslim majority. It is a position that is, as he himself has noted, easier to state in the abstract than to maintain under the political pressures of a society in which religion is constantly being mobilized as a political weapon.

36.4 The Rohingya Crisis and the Limits of Bengali Nationalism

The massive displacement of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar into Bangladesh, which accelerated dramatically following the military crackdowns of 2016 and 2017 and created the world's largest refugee camp at Cox's Bazar, is a crisis with particular resonance for Khan, given that his own birthplace of Maheshkhali is in the Cox's Bazar district. His analysis of the Rohingya crisis exemplifies the way in which his theoretical frameworks can illuminate contemporary political problems in ways that more conventional approaches miss.

Khan's analysis begins with the historical context: the Rohingya are a Muslim minority group in the Rakhine state of Myanmar who have been denied citizenship by the Myanmar state and have faced systematic discrimination, persecution, and periodic mass violence for decades. The Myanmar military's characterization of the Rohingya as "Bengali" immigrants (despite the fact that most Rohingya families have lived in the Rakhine region for generations) reflects a politics of ethnic and religious exclusion that has structural parallels, Khan notes, with the Pakistani military's characterization of Bengali nationalism as an Indian-Hindu plot in 1971.

This parallel is not merely rhetorical for Khan. It reflects a deeper insight about the relationship between nationalism, ethnicity, and state violence: that the construction of national identity through the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities is a recurring feature of postcolonial state formation, and that the experience of being the victim of such exclusion does not automatically produce solidarity with others who are victims of similar processes. The fact that Bangladesh, itself born from a struggle against ethnic and religious persecution, has found it so difficult to extend adequate solidarity and protection to the Rohingya refugees reveals the limits of Bengali nationalism as a framework for political solidarity.

At the same time, Khan insists on the importance of understanding the constraints under which Bangladesh's response to the Rohingya crisis has been made. Bangladesh is a small, densely populated, and poor country that has already absorbed over a million refugees in a region with extremely limited economic capacity. The international community's failure to provide adequate support and to develop a serious political solution to the crisis has placed an unfair burden on Bangladesh, and any honest analysis of Bangladesh's response must acknowledge these constraints while still advocating for the maximum possible protection of refugee rights.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: 1971 IN WORLD HISTORY

37.1 The Cold War Framework and Its Distortions

The Liberation War of 1971 did not occur in an international vacuum. It occurred at a specific moment in the Cold War, and the international response to the crisis was significantly shaped by the strategic calculations of the major powers. Understanding this global context is essential, Khan argues, for understanding both the course of the war and its aftermath.

The most significant Cold War factor was the Nixon-Kissinger administration's alignment with Pakistan in the early 1970s, driven by Pakistan's role as a crucial intermediary in the secret diplomacy that would lead to Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972. Henry Kissinger's back-channel communications with Beijing ran through Islamabad, and this made the Pakistani military government, despite its brutal suppression of the Bengali population, a crucial American strategic partner. The Nixon administration's "tilt toward Pakistan," documented in the famous "Blood Telegram" sent by the American consul general in Dhaka, Archer Blood, who condemned the Pakistani military's atrocities and explicitly accused the US government of moral failure in refusing to act, is for Khan a paradigmatic example of how Cold War strategic calculations could override basic humanitarian and democratic values.

The Soviet Union, by contrast, signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with India in August 1971, providing India with a degree of strategic security that made its military intervention in East Pakistan more feasible. The Soviet support for India and, indirectly, for the liberation of Bangladesh reflected the Soviet strategic interest in weakening Pakistan, a member of the US-aligned CENTO and SEATO military alliances, and in strengthening its relationship with India.

Khan uses this Cold War framework not to reduce the Liberation War to a proxy conflict between superpowers but to show how global power structures shaped the conditions within which the Bangladeshi liberation struggle had to operate. The liberation was genuinely the achievement of the Bengali people, but it occurred in a world where great power interests both constrained and enabled the possibilities of liberation, and where the outcome depended in part on which great power alignments happened to serve the cause of liberation at that particular moment.

This Cold War context also helps explain the inadequate international response to the genocide occurring in East Pakistan. The US government, which had the most direct leverage over the Pakistani military government through its arms sales and financial assistance, chose not to use that leverage to stop the killing, because doing so would have jeopardized its Pakistan-mediated opening to China. The moral consequences of this choice, borne by hundreds of thousands of Bengali civilians who were killed while American officials who knew what was happening remained silent, are, for Khan, a permanent indictment of a foreign policy that systematically subordinated human rights to strategic calculation.

37.2 1971 and the Theory of Anti-Colonial Armed Struggle

Khan situates the Liberation War of 1971 within the broader global history of anti-colonial armed struggle that includes the Algerian War of Independence, the Vietnamese struggle against French and then American imperialism, the Cuban Revolution, the African liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau, and the Palestinian resistance. This situating is not merely contextual: it is an attempt to identify the Liberation War as an instance of a broader historical phenomenon that has its own theoretical literature and its own accumulated insights about the conditions, dynamics, and contradictions of armed anti-colonial struggle.

The theoretical tradition that Khan draws on most extensively in this context is the Fanonian analysis of anti-colonial violence and liberation that we examined in Parts One and Two of this textbook. Fanon's insistence, in *"The Wretched of the Earth,"* that violence is not simply an unfortunate accompaniment of anti-colonial struggle but a necessary dimension of the decolonizing process, through which the colonized subject who has been defined as subhuman reclaims their human dignity through the act of resistance, is a challenging claim that Khan engages with both sympathetically and critically.

He is sympathetic to Fanon's fundamental insight: that the denial of political rights to the Bengali people and the physical violence used to suppress their liberation movement required a violent response, and that the willingness of the Mukti Bahini and the Bengali civilian population to resist with arms was not merely a strategic necessity but a form of political and human self-assertion. The person who takes up arms to defend their community against genocidal violence is not merely fighting for survival; they are asserting their humanity in the most fundamental sense.

But Khan is also critical of the Fanonian valorization of violence in ways that abstract it from its specific historical and moral context. Violence, even in the service of liberation, has costs and consequences that cannot be wished away, and the history of anti-colonial armed struggle is littered with examples of liberation movements that inflicted serious harm on their own populations in the name of resistance. The treatment of perceived collaborators, the internal discipline of the liberation movement, and the use of extreme measures against civilian populations perceived as allied with the enemy are all morally serious questions that a responsible analysis of armed struggle must address.

37.3 Comparative Genocide Studies and the Recognition Question

One of the ongoing demands of Bangladeshi civil society, which Khan has consistently supported, is the formal international recognition of the events of 1971 as genocide. As of 2025, only a handful of countries and sub-national parliaments have formally recognized 1971 as genocide, and the Pakistani state continues to reject this characterization. Khan's engagement with the international politics of genocide recognition draws on the comparative literature in genocide studies and on his broader analysis of international law.

He begins by noting that the question of genocide recognition is never purely academic. Formal recognition by states and international bodies has significant symbolic, political, and legal consequences: it shapes the historical record, creates obligations under the Genocide Convention,

and affects the political relationships between the states involved. The refusal of many states to formally recognize 1971 as genocide, despite substantial evidence that satisfies the legal definition, reflects the political and diplomatic interests of those states rather than any honest historical or legal assessment.

The comparison with the Armenian genocide is instructive here. The events of 1915 to 1923, in which between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman state and its affiliates, have been recognized as genocide by many states and by virtually all genocide scholars, despite the Turkish state's persistent denial. The politics of Armenian genocide recognition have been shaped by Turkey's strategic importance to NATO and by the diplomatic costs of antagonizing a major ally. A similar dynamic operates in the case of Bangladeshi genocide recognition: Pakistan's strategic importance to various states, and the diplomatic costs of recognizing a finding that would delegitimize the Pakistani state's conduct in 1971, have suppressed the political will to make the recognition that historical evidence and legal principles demand.

Khan's analysis of this situation draws on the concept of "epistemological injustice" developed by the philosopher Miranda Fricker: the idea that members of marginalized or oppressed groups are systematically denied credibility as producers and bearers of knowledge, in ways that compound the material injustices they suffer. The refusal to recognize the events of 1971 as genocide is, in this sense, an epistemological injustice as well as a political one: it is a refusal to credit the testimony and the historical knowledge of the Bengali people about what was done to them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: THE REVOLUTIONARY PROMISE UNFULFILLED: 1971 AND THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT

38.1 The Left and the Liberation War: A Complex History

The relationship between the organized left and the Liberation War of 1971 is one of the most complex and least understood dimensions of modern Bangladeshi history, and Khan has devoted sustained attention to recovering and analyzing it. This attention is not merely historical; it is part of Khan's attempt to identify the intellectual and political resources within Bangladeshi history that could support a genuinely transformative politics in the present.

The Bangladeshi left in 1971 was highly fragmented, with different organizations taking different positions on the liberation struggle. The mainstream of the National Awami Party and the student organizations aligned with it supported the liberation movement and participated actively in the armed resistance, contributing significantly to the Mukti Bahini's guerrilla operations. A faction of the left, influenced by the Chinese Communist Party's alignment with Pakistan (which reflected the Sino-Soviet split and China's own strategic interests), initially characterized the liberation movement as an Indian imperialist intervention and refused to support it, a position that was later recognized even by those who held it as a catastrophic political and moral error.

The complexity of left responses to 1971 is, for Khan, a window into the broader problems of the Bangladeshi left: its organizational fragmentation, its tendency to subordinate local political analysis to the positions of external communist parties, its difficulty in connecting abstract theoretical frameworks to the concrete aspirations of the Bengali peasantry and working class, and its failure to develop a politics that could mobilize the enormous popular energy of the liberation struggle in service of genuinely transformative social goals.

Despite these failures, Khan insists on the positive dimensions of the left's contribution to the liberation struggle. The left's presence within the Mukti Bahini, its organizational networks in rural areas, and its articulation of a social vision that went beyond the Awami League's more moderate nationalism all contributed to making the liberation struggle more than a merely political event. The left forces were the ones who insisted that independence without social transformation would simply replace Pakistani exploitation with a Bangladeshi ruling class no less indifferent to the welfare of the poor.

38.2 BAKSAL and the Tragedy of Mujib's Authoritarianism

The trajectory of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government between January 1972 (when he returned from Pakistani imprisonment to lead the new nation) and August 1975 (when he was assassinated in a military coup) is, for Khan, a profound political tragedy that illuminates the structural difficulties of post-liberation politics in ways that remain relevant today.

Mujib returned from imprisonment with enormous moral authority and popular support. The expectations for his government were immense: the reconstruction of a country devastated by war and genocide, the establishment of functioning democratic institutions, the delivery of social and economic progress for a population that had suffered colonial exploitation for generations, and the honoring of the revolutionary promises of the liberation struggle. These expectations were, given the actual conditions of post-liberation Bangladesh, almost certainly impossible to fulfill simultaneously and quickly.

The trajectory of Mujib's government was a progressive narrowing of political space, culminating in the establishment of the one-party BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League) system in January 1975, which formally abolished all political parties except a newly created national party under Mujib's leadership. This move, made in the name of achieving the "second revolution" of social and economic transformation, was in practice the abandonment of the democratic principles for which the liberation war had been fought.

Khan's analysis of BAKSAL is one of the most politically sensitive aspects of his engagement with the liberation heritage, because it requires criticizing the founding father whose legacy the Awami League has made quasi-sacred. He does so, characteristically, with a combination of sympathy and rigor. He acknowledges the genuine difficulties that Mujib faced, including the famine of 1974, the continuing violence of right-wing and left-wing armed groups, the economic chaos of the post-war period, and the collapse of public order in a country that was trying to build institutions from scratch after a devastating war. He acknowledges that Mujib's intentions, whatever the quality of his political judgment, were not those of a cynical autocrat seeking personal power.

But he is clear that the BAKSAL system was a political catastrophe. It destroyed the institutional foundations of the democratic order that the liberation war had been fought to establish, it drove opposition movements underground where they became more violent and extreme, it discredited the left by associating it with the project of authoritarian one-party rule, and it created the political conditions for the military coup of August 1975 and the subsequent fifteen years of military rule that did so much to shape the distorted political culture of contemporary Bangladesh.

The lessons Khan draws from the BAKSAL episode are lessons about the relationship between revolutionary goals and democratic means. He argues, drawing on the tradition of socialist democratic theory from Rosa Luxemburg to Norberto Bobbio, that the suspension of democratic rights in the name of revolutionary transformation is always self-defeating, because it destroys the popular mobilization and collective self-organization through which genuine social transformation occurs. The substitution of party or state authority for popular self-governance does not accelerate social transformation; it arrests it, by cutting off the social learning and collective agency through which new social forms are actually created.

38.3 The Military Interregnum: Zia, Ershad, and the Reorganization of Power

The period between the coup of August 1975 and the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991, covering the governments of Generals Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and Hussein Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990), represents for Khan a fundamental reorganization of the social and political structures of Bangladesh that had profound and lasting consequences. He has analyzed this period in several essays and lectures, and his analysis illuminates the mechanisms through which a brief post-liberation opening was closed and a very different kind of political order was consolidated.

Ziaur Rahman's government was not, Khan insists, simply a military dictatorship of the usual kind. Zia was a genuinely popular figure, a celebrated commander of the liberation war whose personal courage and charisma gave him a degree of popular legitimacy that extended beyond the military's institutional power. His political project was, in essence, the reorganization of Bangladeshi political life around a new hegemonic bloc that combined military leadership, Islamist political organizations (including Jamaat-e-Islami, whose rehabilitation Zia oversaw), a newly constituted business class (whose development Zia encouraged through liberalization policies that attracted both remittances from Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf and investment from international donors), and a reconstituted rural political network built around the Union Parishad system of local government.

The ideological centerpiece of this reorganization was the concept of "Bangladeshi nationalism" that Zia championed as an alternative to Bengali nationalism. The significance of this shift deserves emphasis. Bengali nationalism, as understood in the liberation movement, was a commitment to the Bengali language and culture as the foundation of national identity, and it was a broadly secular concept that drew on the humanist and progressive strands of the Bengali intellectual tradition. Bangladeshi nationalism, as articulated by Zia, was a different concept: it defined Bangladeshi identity around the territory and the Muslim majority religious culture of Bangladesh, distinguishing it sharply from the Bengali identity shared with the Hindu Bengalis

of West Bengal. This shift had immediate political consequences: it made Islam a constitutive element of national identity in ways that legitimized Islamist political formations and marginalized secular left alternatives.

Khan uses the Gramscian concept of passive revolution to analyze this period. Passive revolution, Gramsci's concept for revolutionary change that occurs from above, without mass popular participation, and that incorporates elements of the demands of subordinate classes while defusing their revolutionary potential, describes the way in which Zia's reorganization of Bangladeshi political life accommodated some of the aspirations of the liberation movement (independence, Bengali cultural identity, economic development) while fundamentally foreclosing the social and economic transformation that the left had fought for.

Ershad's government (1982-1990), by contrast, was a cruder exercise of military power that lacked Zia's political sophistication and popular legitimacy. Ershad's insertion of Islam as the state religion into the constitution in 1988 was a cynical political maneuver rather than a principled constitutional position, made in the context of an attempt to build Islamic political legitimacy for a government that was widely perceived as corrupt and repressive. Khan's analysis of this move focuses on its long-term constitutional consequences, which we examined in Part Four, and on what it reveals about the political instrumentalization of religion in Bangladeshi political life.

38.4 The Restoration of Democracy and Its Limits

The mass uprising of 1990 that forced Ershad from power and led to the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991 was, for Khan, a genuine popular achievement that demonstrated the continuing vitality of Bangladeshi democratic aspirations. But the subsequent thirty years of Bangladeshi democratic politics, characterized by intense rivalry between the Awami League and the BNP, frequent political violence, a deeply corrupt and patronage-driven political system, and the progressive erosion of democratic norms under Sheikh Hasina's increasingly authoritarian government, have been a story of democratic promise unfulfilled.

Khan's analysis of post-1991 Bangladeshi democracy draws on the comparative politics literature on what scholars call "competitive authoritarianism" or "electoral authoritarianism": political systems in which formal democratic institutions (elections, legislatures, courts) exist and function, but in which the playing field is systematically tilted in favor of the incumbents, and in which the political opposition is systematically disadvantaged through the abuse of state power, the capture of independent institutions, and the use of legal processes as weapons of political persecution.

His analysis is particularly sharp on the period of Sheikh Hasina's government after 2009, which progressively restricted political freedoms in ways that he characterized, in a series of essays from 2018 onward, as the construction of a "soft authoritarianism" that was becoming progressively harder. The use of the Digital Security Act to imprison journalists and critics, the subordination of the judiciary to executive control, the manipulation of electoral processes to prevent genuine political competition, and the Awami League's monopolization of the state apparatus were, in his analysis, the political consequences of the ideological formation he had

been analyzing for years: a political party that had conflated its own interests with the national interest, that had made itself the exclusive custodian of the liberation heritage, and that was therefore unable to acknowledge the legitimacy of political opposition without implicitly acknowledging the limits of its own claims.

38.5 The July 2024 Uprising: Revolution, Reform, or Rupture?

The events of July and August 2024 have given fresh urgency to the questions that Khan has been raising for decades. The student-led uprising that began with protests against the quota system and escalated into a nationwide movement against the Hasina government, culminating in Hasina's flight from the country and the formation of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, represents a political rupture of the first order, and Khan's response to these events draws together all the strands of his political analysis.

In a major lecture delivered in late 2024, Khan characterized the July uprising as the third great popular uprising in Bangladeshi history, following the language movement of 1952 and the mass movement against Pakistani rule that culminated in the liberation of 1971. Like those earlier uprisings, the July uprising was characterized by massive popular participation that cut across class lines, by the spontaneous emergence of new forms of political organization and solidarity, and by a confrontation with state power that the normal mechanisms of political management had been unable to prevent.

Khan's analysis of what distinguishes the July uprising from those earlier moments draws on his most fundamental theoretical frameworks. The liberation movement of 1971 was organized primarily around a politics of national identity: the assertion of Bengali identity against Pakistani denial. The July 2024 uprising, while it drew on the symbolic resources of 1971, was organized primarily around a politics of social and political rights: the assertion of the rights of young people to equal opportunity, to physical safety from state violence, and to political voice, against a regime that had systematically denied all three.

This distinction is, for Khan, politically significant. It suggests that the July uprising represents, at least in potential, a more explicitly class-conscious and politically democratic form of popular mobilization than the liberation movement of 1971, one that is oriented not primarily toward national identity but toward the substantive social and economic rights that national independence has failed to deliver. Whether this potential will be actualized depends, he argues, on the political choices made in the period of transition: specifically, on whether the forces that emerged from the uprising will be able to develop a coherent political project that addresses the structural causes of inequality and authoritarianism, or whether they will be captured by one or another variant of the same political formations that have cycled through power without transforming the underlying social structures.

His assessment of the interim government under Muhammad Yunus is characteristically cautious. He acknowledges Yunus's international stature and the genuine popular legitimacy that his government has derived from the uprising that brought it to power. But he raises questions about the political vision and institutional capacity of a government composed primarily of technocrats and civil society figures without a strong base of social organization, and he insists

that the fundamental political question is not the character of the interim government but the development of the social and political forces that will shape the transition to a new democratic order.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE: THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS: 1971 THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL THEORY

39.1 1971 as Primal Scene: A Lacanian Reading

The concept of the primal scene in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis refers to an originary event or fantasy that organizes the subject's psychic life without being fully representable or fully available to conscious reflection. It is not simply an event that happened in the past but a structuring fantasy that shapes the present in ways that the subject is often not fully aware of. Khan uses this concept, with careful qualifications about its application to collective rather than individual subjectivity, to analyze the role of 1971 in Bangladeshi political culture.

For Khan, 1971 functions as something like a national primal scene: an originary event that is at once constitutive of Bangladeshi national identity and impossible to fully represent or integrate into a coherent national narrative. Its constitutive role is obvious: without 1971, there is no Bangladesh, no independent Bengali-speaking nation, no specific political and cultural form of life that distinguishes Bangladeshis from other South Asians. But its traumatic character, the genocide, the mass rape, the destruction, the moral complexity of the various actors involved, makes it resistant to the kind of clean, heroic narrative that national mythologies usually prefer.

The political consequence of this traumatic character, in Khan's analysis, is a recurrent tendency in Bangladeshi political culture toward what Freudian theory calls repetition compulsion: the unconscious repetition of the traumatic situation, not in order to master it but in ways that re-enact its basic structure without resolving it. The cycle of political violence, of authoritarian attempts to suppress the political energies that the liberation struggle released, of accusations of collaboration and counter-accusations of betrayal that have characterized Bangladeshi political life for fifty years, are, from this perspective, symptoms of an unprocessed national trauma rather than rational political choices.

What would it mean to process this trauma? For Khan, it would require something analogous to what psychoanalytic theory calls "working through" as opposed to "acting out": not the repetitive re-enactment of the traumatic situation but a sustained engagement with its complexity that allows its genuine meaning to be acknowledged and integrated. In political terms, this means: an honest historical reckoning with all the dimensions of 1971, including the complexity of the resistance movement, the failure of the post-liberation political project, and the ongoing unresolved demands of those who died; a genuine process of accountability for the crimes of 1971 that meets fair trial standards; and a political project oriented toward the social and economic transformation that the liberation promise implied but never delivered.

39.2 The Materialist Supplement: Class, Capital, and the Revolutionary Moment

The Lacanian reading of 1971 as national primal scene is, in Khan's method, always supplemented by a materialist analysis that asks about the class dimensions of the historical event and its legacy. The liberation war was not simply an event in the psychic life of the nation; it was a material event with specific economic causes and specific economic consequences, and the failure of the post-liberation political project was not only a psychic failure of working through but also a material failure of class politics.

Khan's materialist analysis of 1971 focuses on what he calls the unrealized class content of the liberation struggle. The liberation movement mobilized across class lines, but the different classes that participated in it had different and in some respects contradictory interests. The Bengali professional classes and intelligentsia (lawyers, doctors, academics, journalists) wanted political independence and the cultural dignity of Bengali language and identity, but were not necessarily committed to the social and economic transformation that would challenge their own class position. The Bengali business and merchant class wanted the removal of West Pakistani competition and the creation of conditions favorable to Bengali capital accumulation, but again were not committed to the redistribution of wealth or the empowerment of labor. The Bengali peasantry and working class wanted land reform, fair wages, an end to exploitation, and access to education and public services, demands that went far beyond the political independence that all classes agreed on.

The class compromise that made the liberation movement possible, and that was expressed in the broad coalition of the Awami League's politics, required that these different class interests be temporarily subordinated to the single goal of independence. But once independence was achieved, the class contradictions that had been submerged by the liberation struggle reasserted themselves. The Awami League government found itself unable to satisfy the contradictory demands of its different class constituents, and its progressive drift toward authoritarianism was partly an attempt to manage these class contradictions by suppressing the political expression of the demands of the subordinate classes.

This materialist analysis is consistent with Khan's broader understanding of nationalism as an ideology that can temporarily unite different classes in a common political project but that cannot, by itself, resolve the social and economic conflicts that characterize class society. The transition from the phase of national liberation to the phase of social transformation requires not merely the achievement of political independence but the development of a political force capable of organizing and representing the interests of the subordinate classes in the post-liberation period. The failure of the Bangladeshi left to develop such a force in the critical years immediately after 1971 is, for Khan, one of the most consequential political failures in the history of modern Bangladesh.

39.3 The Postcolonial Supplement: Dependency, Development, and the Limits of National Sovereignty

The third theoretical lens through which Khan reads 1971 is the postcolonial critique of development and national sovereignty that we examined at length in Part Three. Here, 1971 appears not as national primal scene or as moment of class struggle but as the founding moment

of a new form of political sovereignty that has been systematically constrained and shaped by the structural conditions of the global political economy.

Bangladesh's post-independence development trajectory has been shaped at every point by its position in the global political economy: as a recipient of development aid from international donors whose conditions have consistently pushed the country toward neoliberal economic policies; as a supplier of cheap labor to the global garment industry, whose terms of engagement with Bangladeshi workers and suppliers reflect the power asymmetry between global capital and poor-country governments; and as a sender of labor migrants whose remittances have become the most important source of foreign exchange in the Bangladeshi economy, generating dependency on Gulf states and their specific forms of social and cultural influence.

This analysis of structural constraint is not, for Khan, an argument for fatalism or for the view that sovereignty and self-determination are impossible in a world of global capitalism. It is an argument for a specific kind of political strategy: one that recognizes the structural constraints within which Bangladeshi politics operates while also identifying the spaces for maneuver and the alliances, both domestic and international, that could expand those spaces. The demand for a new international economic order, the advocacy for fair trade rather than free trade, the insistence on debt cancellation for poor countries, the support for South-South economic cooperation: these are all dimensions of a political strategy that takes seriously both the genuine aspirations of the liberation promise and the structural conditions that have frustrated their realization.

39.4 Fanon and Khan: The Wretched of the Earth in the Bay of Bengal

The final theoretical synthesis in Khan's engagement with 1971 is his reading of Fanon. As we have noted at several points in this textbook, Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" is one of the foundational texts of Khan's entire intellectual project. His reading of Fanon in relation to 1971 produces insights that go beyond anything that Fanon himself could have anticipated, because the Bangladeshi case presents specific features that both confirm and complicate Fanon's theoretical framework.

The Fanonian elements that are most clearly confirmed by the Bangladeshi case include: the analysis of the colonial situation as a fundamentally violent relationship that requires violent resistance for its resolution; the analysis of the comprador bourgeoisie as a class that achieves political independence without social transformation; the analysis of nationalism as an ideology that can mobilize anti-colonial struggle but that tends to freeze the transformation process before it addresses the social and economic dimensions of colonial exploitation; and the analysis of the psychological dimensions of colonization and decolonization, including the colonized subject's internalization of the colonizer's values and the psychic work required to reclaim one's own subjectivity.

But the Bangladeshi case also presents elements that complicate Fanon's framework in interesting ways. Fanon wrote primarily about the African colonial experience under French rule, and his analysis reflects specific features of that experience, including the degree of racial differentiation between colonizers and colonized, the specific character of French colonial

ideology, and the particular forms of political and economic organization that characterized French colonialism. The Bengali case, where the colonizers were first British and then (in the Pakistani period) Muslim co-religionists, where the relevant categories of colonial differentiation were primarily linguistic, cultural, and regional rather than racial in the simple sense, and where the liberation struggle was embedded in a dense network of regional and global political relationships that Fanon's framework does not fully capture, requires modifications and extensions of the Fanonian analysis.

Khan's most important modification of Fanon in the Bangladeshi context is his insistence that the psychic dimensions of colonization operate differently when the colonial relationship is between two Muslim communities than when it is between communities differentiated by race and religion. The Pakistani state's attempt to use Islamic identity as a tool of colonial domination, making Islamic unity the basis of a political relationship that was in practice one of Bengali subordination to West Pakistani dominance, created a specific psychic structure in which the category of religion was simultaneously a tool of oppression and a resource for resistance. This complexity requires a more nuanced account of the relationship between religious identity and anti-colonial struggle than Fanon's primarily secular framework provides.

CONCLUSION TO PART FIVE: THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

Part Five has undertaken a comprehensive examination of Salimullah Khan's engagement with the Liberation War of 1971 and its legacy. We have examined his historical analysis of the events of 1971 themselves, tracing the arc from the electoral crisis of December 1970 through the genocide of Operation Searchlight to the liberation of December 1971. We have examined the politics of memory that have surrounded 1971 in the subsequent decades, analyzing the competing claims of the Awami League, the BNP, and the left to the liberation heritage. We have examined the question of justice, engaging with Khan's analysis of the International Crimes Tribunal and the broader theoretical questions of transitional justice. We have examined the relationship between 1971 and the question of national identity, analyzing the tripartite tension between Bengali cultural nationalism, Muslim majority nationalism, and subaltern democratic nationalism. We have situated 1971 in its regional and global context, examining the Cold War framework and the comparative history of anti-colonial armed struggle. And we have undertaken a theoretical synthesis, bringing together the Lacanian, Marxist, postcolonial, and Fanonian dimensions of Khan's analysis.

Several themes emerge from this examination that deserve particular emphasis as we move toward Part Six.

The first is the theme of the unfulfilled revolutionary promise. The Liberation War of 1971 promised not only political independence but social and economic transformation, and the failure of that promise to be fulfilled is the central political fact of Bangladeshi history since 1971. Understanding this failure requires both a structural analysis of the class forces and global economic conditions that frustrated transformation and a political analysis of the specific decisions made by specific political actors in the critical post-liberation period.

The second theme is the politics of memory as a site of political struggle. The meaning of 1971 has never been fixed and settled; it has always been contested, by forces with different political interests and different social visions. Understanding these contests is essential for understanding Bangladeshi political culture, and for identifying the possibilities for a politics of memory that serves the demands of justice rather than the interests of the powerful.

The third theme is the relationship between individual accountability and structural transformation. The question of justice for the crimes of 1971 cannot be reduced to a question of criminal prosecution. It requires a broader reckoning with the social structures and political formations that enabled mass atrocity and that continue to generate conditions of injustice in the present. Criminal accountability is necessary but not sufficient for the kind of justice that 1971 demands.

The fourth theme is the connection between 1971 and the present. The July 2024 uprising, in Khan's analysis, is not a break from the history of 1971 but a continuation of it: another moment in which the unfulfilled promise of the liberation struggle asserts itself against the political formations that have claimed to honor that promise while systematically failing to do so. Understanding the present requires understanding the past, and understanding the past requires the kind of rigorous, politically engaged, theoretically sophisticated historical analysis that Khan has devoted his career to providing.

Part Six of this textbook will turn to what Khan considers the most urgent contemporary challenge for Bangladeshi political and intellectual life: the question of language, education, and cultural politics in an era of globalization, neoliberalism, and rapid social change. The liberation struggle was in significant part a struggle for the right of the Bengali people to inhabit their own language and culture. How has that struggle been won and lost in the post-liberation decades? What does the future of Bengali cultural life look like? And what is the proper relationship between Bengali particularity and global universality in a world where the forces of cultural homogenization are more powerful than ever? These are the questions to which we now turn.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART FIVE

Key Historical and Theoretical Concepts

Operation Searchlight: The code name for the Pakistani military's crackdown on the Bengali population of East Pakistan that began on the night of 25-26 March 1971. The operation was planned by General Tikka Khan, who had earned the sobriquet "Butcher of Balochistan" for his earlier suppression of the Baloch insurgency, and involved simultaneous attacks on multiple targets across Dhaka and other cities.

The Mukti Bahini: The Bengali word for "liberation forces," referring to the diverse array of armed groups that fought against the Pakistani military during the Liberation War. The Mukti Bahini included regular military units composed of defecting Pakistani army personnel, the student fighters of the Mujibnagar government's armed forces, and numerous local guerrilla

groups. The diversity of the liberation forces was both a strength (it made the resistance genuinely popular and geographically extensive) and a source of coordination problems.

The Blood Telegram: The cable sent in March and April 1971 by Archer Blood, the American Consul General in Dhaka, to the State Department in Washington, warning of the atrocities being committed by the Pakistani military and accusing the US government of moral failure for its silence. Blood and his staff ultimately signed a formal "dissent cable" against official US policy, an almost unprecedented act of diplomatic insubordination. Nixon and Kissinger were furious and had Blood transferred from his position.

Simla Agreement (1972): The bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan, signed in July 1972, that formally ended the 1971 war. The agreement established the line of control in Kashmir and committed both countries to resolving their disputes through bilateral negotiation. Its provisions for the repatriation of prisoners of war effectively foreclosed the possibility of trying Pakistani military personnel before Bangladeshi or international tribunals for the crimes of 1971.

The Collaborators Tribunal: The domestic tribunal established by Sheikh Mujib's government in 1972 to try those who had collaborated with the Pakistani military during the Liberation War. It operated under the Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order, 1972, and detained approximately 37,000 individuals before the process was abandoned and an amnesty issued in 1973.

BAKSAL: Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League, the one-party system established by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's constitutional amendment in January 1975. The system abolished all political parties except the newly created BAKSAL, gave Mujib sweeping executive powers, and replaced the parliamentary system with a presidential one. BAKSAL was ended by the military coup of August 1975 in which Mujib was assassinated.

The Shahbag Movement (2013): The mass protests that began in Shahbag Square in Dhaka in February 2013, demanding the death penalty for those convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal and a ban on Jamaat-e-Islami and its affiliates. The movement drew enormous crowds and generated intense controversy about the relationship between popular mobilization and judicial independence.

Passive Revolution: Antonio Gramsci's concept for social and political change that occurs through the transformation of the state from above, incorporating elements of subordinate class demands, rather than through the revolutionary mobilization of subordinate classes from below. Gramsci developed this concept in his analysis of Italian national unification (the Risorgimento) but it has been widely applied to the analysis of postcolonial state formation.

Transitional Justice: The field of scholarship and practice concerned with how societies address the legacies of mass atrocity committed by previous regimes or in armed conflict. Major mechanisms of transitional justice include criminal prosecution, truth commissions, reparations, institutional reform, and memorialization. The field has grown enormously since the early 1990s and encompasses diverse and often conflicting approaches to the relationship between justice, peace, and democratic consolidation.

Working Through (Durcharbeitung): A Freudian concept referring to the psychoanalytic process by which the patient does not merely recognize the unconscious material that the analysis has brought to consciousness but engages with it repeatedly, in different contexts, until it is genuinely integrated into the patient's psychic life rather than continuing to produce symptoms. The concept has been applied, by Khan and others, to the question of how societies can genuinely integrate traumatic histories rather than simply acknowledging them while continuing to act out their unresolved dynamics.

Discussion Questions for Part Five

1. Khan argues that the Liberation War of 1971 was both a national liberation struggle and a social revolution that was ultimately aborted. What does he mean by the "social revolutionary" dimension of the liberation struggle, and what evidence does he provide for the claim that this revolution was aborted? Do you find this analysis convincing? What evidence might complicate it?
2. The politics of memory around 1971 have been characterized by intense conflict between the Awami League and the BNP, each claiming to be the authentic custodian of the liberation heritage. Khan argues that both parties have instrumentalized the liberation heritage for political purposes. Is it possible to have a genuinely national memory of 1971 that is not captured by any particular political party? What institutional arrangements might facilitate a more genuinely shared and less politically instrumentalized engagement with the history of 1971?
3. The International Crimes Tribunal has been defended as a long-overdue reckoning with the crimes of 1971 and criticized as a politically motivated exercise that fell short of international fair trial standards. How should we evaluate the ICT? Is it possible to affirm the importance of accountability while criticizing the procedural framework within which it was pursued? What lessons does the ICT experience hold for future transitional justice processes?
4. Khan uses the Lacanian concept of the primal scene to analyze 1971 as a founding trauma that continues to structure Bangladeshi political culture in ways that are not fully conscious or rational. Do you find this psychoanalytic framing illuminating? What are its strengths and limitations as an analytical framework for understanding political culture? Are there aspects of Bangladeshi political life that this framework illuminates particularly well, or aspects that it obscures?
5. The July 2024 uprising brought together students and young people from across the political spectrum, including those associated with both pro-Awami League and pro-BNP family backgrounds, in a common movement against Hasina's government. Khan characterizes this as a moment when the political cleavages that have structured Bangladeshi politics since 1971 were temporarily transcended by a more fundamental social demand. Do you agree with this characterization? What are the obstacles to the consolidation of a genuinely new political force emerging from the uprising?
6. Khan argues that the rehabilitation of Jamaat-e-Islami as a legitimate political actor in the years after 1975 was a profound injustice that has had lasting negative consequences for Bangladeshi political culture. Others argue that the inclusion of Islamist parties in

democratic competition is preferable to their exclusion, which would drive them underground and make them more extreme. How should a democratic polity handle the question of parties that have a history of involvement in mass atrocity? Are there democratic grounds for excluding such parties from participation?

7. The Rohingya crisis has posed a severe test for Bangladeshi national solidarity, as the country has struggled to provide adequate protection and support for over a million refugees from Myanmar. Khan notes the painful irony that a country born from a refugee crisis and a genocide has itself struggled to uphold refugee rights. What structural factors explain this failure of solidarity? What political and institutional changes would be needed to address the Rohingya crisis more adequately?
8. Khan draws heavily on Fanon's analysis of anti-colonial violence and liberation in his reading of 1971. What are the most illuminating aspects of the Fanonian framework for understanding the Bangladeshi case, and where does the framework require modification or extension to fit the specific features of the Bengali liberation struggle?

Extended Reading List for Part Five

On the History of 1971:

Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (1972), the first major scholarly analysis of the causes of the separation of East Pakistan, written in the immediate aftermath of the war by a Bangladeshi political scientist and still an indispensable starting point for understanding the historical background.

Richard Sisson and Leo Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (1990), a comprehensive account of the diplomatic and military history of the 1971 war based on extensive interviews with key participants on all sides.

Gary Bass, *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* (2013), a meticulously researched account of the Nixon administration's response to the genocide in East Pakistan, based on previously classified American government documents. The book's use of the word "genocide" in its subtitle is itself a political statement that Khan endorses.

Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (2013), an ambitious global history that situates the events of 1971 within the Cold War and the broader international politics of the era.

Nayanika Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (2015), an ethnographic study of the experiences of birangona (women who experienced sexual violence during the war) and the politics of their commemoration and representation in contemporary Bangladesh.

On Memory and Transitional Justice:

Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (2011), an oral history project that recovers the experiences of women and ordinary Bangladeshis during the war, challenging the official commemorative narratives.

Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), the philosophical masterwork on the relationship between individual and collective memory, historical knowledge, and the ethics of forgetting and remembering.

Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (2000), the founding text of transitional justice as an academic field, tracing the genealogy of transitional justice mechanisms from Nuremberg to the post-Cold War wave of democratic transitions.

Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence* (1998), a thoughtful examination of the moral dimensions of different responses to mass atrocity, from criminal prosecution to truth commissions to reparations.

On Bengali Nationalism and National Identity:

Sufia Mendus Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (2006), an important scholarly analysis of the competing constructions of Bangladeshi national identity.

David Lewis, *Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society* (2011), a comprehensive overview of Bangladeshi political history and contemporary politics that provides useful context for Khan's analysis.

Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993), the foundational postcolonial critique of nationalism that informs Khan's approach to Bengali nationalism.

On Fanon and Anti-Colonial Theory:

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961, Constance Farrington translation; 2004 Richard Philcox translation), the foundational text of anti-colonial theory that Khan engages with throughout his work. Both translations have value; the Philcox translation is more recent and more accurate, but the Farrington translation (with Jean-Paul Sartre's preface) has its own historical significance.

David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (2000), the most comprehensive biography of Fanon, essential for understanding the biographical and historical context of his thought.

Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (2006), a memoir by Fanon's colleague and collaborator that provides intimate insight into his life and thought.

On the July 2024 Uprising and Recent Bangladesh:

The uprising of July and August 2024 is recent enough that the definitive scholarly literature has not yet appeared, but important analyses have been published in academic journals including the *Journal of Democracy*, *South Asia Research*, and *Contemporary South Asia*. Khan's own essays and lectures on the uprising, some of which are available through the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh's Centre for Advanced Theory and through online platforms, are essential reading for understanding his interpretation of these events.

End of Part Five

Part Six: Language, Education, and Cultural Politics: The Struggle for Bengali Modernity will follow.

PART SIX: LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND CULTURAL POLITICS: THE STRUGGLE FOR BENGALI MODERNITY

PREFACE TO PART SIX

There is a famous remark attributed to Ahmed Sofa, the towering Bengali essayist who was Salimullah Khan's most formative intellectual mentor, to the effect that the greatest danger facing Bangladesh is not poverty, not corruption, and not communalism, but the slow death of the Bengali language as a living vehicle of serious thought. Sofa meant by this that a language does not die simply when its speakers stop using it for everyday communication. It dies when its most educated speakers cease to use it for the highest intellectual work, when the questions of science, philosophy, jurisprudence, economics, and political theory that define the cutting edge of human knowledge stop being asked and answered in that language. When that happens, the language becomes a folk artifact, beautiful perhaps, culturally resonant certainly, but cut off from the living stream of intellectual development that gives a language its power to name the world and to transform it.

Khan has made this warning his own, elaborating it, deepening it, giving it a theoretical foundation in psychoanalysis and political economy, and applying it with increasing urgency to the conditions of contemporary Bangladeshi intellectual and educational life. Part Six of this textbook examines this dimension of his work in detail and with the seriousness it deserves, because the question of language and education is not, in Khan's analysis, a merely cultural or pedagogical question. It is a political question of the first order, inseparable from the questions of class power, colonial inheritance, and the conditions for genuine self-determination that we have been examining throughout this textbook.

The organization of Part Six follows a logic that moves from the most general to the most specific. We begin with the philosophy of language that underlies Khan's advocacy for Bengali,

engaging with the theoretical tradition from Humboldt through Benjamin and Fanon that frames his understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and political life. We then examine his specific analysis of the Bangladeshi educational system, tracing the colonial origins of its current structure and identifying the class dynamics that its apparently technical features conceal. We turn next to his engagement with the Bangla Academy and with the politics of institutional language governance. We examine his reading of specific Bengali literary and cultural figures, showing how his critical engagements with Lalon Shah, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Ahmed Sofa constitute a sustained argument about the proper character of Bengali intellectual modernity. We then address the specific controversies of 2024 and 2025, including the Bangla Academy Award controversy and his December 2024 conference interventions on language evolution, which brought his ideas to renewed public attention. And we conclude with a synthetic assessment of what Khan's cultural politics mean for the future of Bengali modernity in a world of accelerating globalization and cultural standardization.

CHAPTER FORTY: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: WHY IT MATTERS WHAT TONGUE YOU THINK IN

40.1 Language as World-Formation: The Humboldtian Inheritance

The philosophical tradition that most directly informs Khan's understanding of language and its relationship to thought begins with Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the Prussian philosopher, linguist, and educational reformer who is one of the foundational figures of modern linguistics and of what we might call linguistic philosophy before that term had been coined. Humboldt's central insight, which he developed most fully in his posthumously published "On Language: The Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Race" (1836), is that language is not merely a tool for communicating thoughts that exist independently of their linguistic expression, but a constitutive element of thought itself.

For Humboldt, each language is a distinct "worldview" (*Weltansicht*), a specific way of organizing and experiencing reality that is not fully translatable into any other language. The differences between languages are not merely differences of vocabulary and grammar but differences of thought-form: ways of dividing up experience, categorizing phenomena, and relating concepts to one another that reflect the specific historical and cultural experience of the people who speak the language. A language is, in this sense, the accumulated intellectual achievement of a people over generations, the crystallized form of their way of being in and making sense of the world.

This insight has profound implications for the question of colonial language policy that Khan addresses. If language is constitutive of thought rather than merely expressive of it, then the imposition of a colonial language on a subject people is not merely a practical inconvenience but a form of cognitive violence: a restructuring of the thought-forms through which the colonized people understand themselves and their world, in favor of the thought-forms of the colonizer. The person educated in the colonizer's language does not simply learn to express their thoughts

in a new medium. They are restructured as a thinking subject, their cognitive habits shaped by a language that carries within it the assumptions, the categories, and the worldview of a civilization that has defined itself over centuries in opposition to and in domination of the civilization from which the colonial subject comes.

Khan does not adopt Humboldt's position in its most extreme form, which would imply a kind of linguistic determinism, the view that thought is so completely determined by language that speakers of different languages inhabit incommensurable realities. This extreme position, associated with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in twentieth-century linguistics, is both empirically questionable and politically unhelpful, because it implies that cross-linguistic understanding is impossible. Khan's position is more nuanced: language shapes thought without determining it absolutely, creates tendencies and preferences and habits of mind without completely closing off alternative ways of thinking, and constitutes a specific range of cognitive possibilities without exhausting the possibilities that human intelligence could in principle explore.

What this nuanced position implies for language policy is not that it is impossible to think serious thoughts in a non-native language, but that the systematic privileging of a foreign language over the mother tongue in educational institutions creates a structure of cognitive disadvantage and psychic alienation that has both individual and collective consequences. The individual who must think in a language that is not their mother tongue must devote cognitive resources to the mediation between languages that would otherwise be available for the substantive intellectual work at hand. And the collective that conducts its highest intellectual work in a foreign language progressively loses the capacity to develop the vernacular language as a vehicle of serious thought, creating a self-reinforcing cycle in which the vernacular comes to seem inadequate for intellectual work precisely because it has been excluded from it.

40.2 Benjamin on Language: Translation, Loss, and the Task of the Intellectual

Walter Benjamin's philosophy of language provides Khan with a second, more mystical but equally powerful resource for thinking about the stakes of the language question. Benjamin's early essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916) and his famous essay "The Task of the Translator" (1923) develop a philosophy of language that is quite different from Humboldt's but that converges with it at several crucial points.

For Benjamin, each language contains within it a specific way of naming the world, a specific configuration of what he calls the "linguistic being" of things, that is not exhausted by any particular communicative act and that cannot be fully captured in translation. Translation is therefore not simply a transfer of meaning from one linguistic container to another. It is an encounter between two languages in which each reveals something of its own specific character and its own limitations, and in which the original text is transformed rather than simply reproduced. Benjamin's famous image of translation as a royal robe that reveals the body beneath, without being identical with it, captures the idea that the translated text and the original text each illuminate what the other conceals.

What Khan draws from Benjamin is primarily the concept of the non-equivalence of languages and the irreducibility of each language's specific way of naming the world. In his practice as a

translator, which has included Bengali translations of Plato, Charles Baudelaire, Frantz Fanon, and Dorothee Solle, Khan has consistently confronted the specific challenges of translating between European languages and Bengali: not merely the challenges of vocabulary and grammar but the deeper challenges of finding Bengali equivalents for conceptual structures that have been shaped by specific European historical and philosophical experiences.

His translation practice is, in this sense, itself a kind of philosophical argument: an argument for the proposition that Bengali is a language capable of bearing the full weight of serious intellectual thought, that the concepts of European philosophy and social theory can be rendered in Bengali without fatal loss of meaning, but also that this rendering always involves a creative act of philosophical translation, a finding of the places in Bengali thought and language where the European concept resonates with something native, and the identification of the places where it does not, where the translation requires a neologism or a conceptual supplement that enriches both the concept and the language.

This practice of translation as philosophical work is one of Khan's most distinctive contributions to Bangladeshi intellectual life. It is also one of his most practically important, because the translation of serious intellectual texts into Bengali is a necessary condition for the possibility of conducting serious intellectual discourse in Bengali. If the most important philosophical and theoretical texts of the modern world are available only in English, French, and German, then the proposition that Bengali can be a vehicle of serious intellectual thought is empirically undermined: how can scholars work in Bengali on questions of Lacanian psychoanalysis or Marxist political economy if the primary texts are not accessible in Bengali?

40.3 Fanon on Language: The Colonized Tongue and the Politics of Self-Expression

The third major theoretical resource that Khan draws on for his philosophy of language is Frantz Fanon's analysis of the relationship between colonial language policy and the psychic structure of colonial subjecthood. Fanon's early work "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) includes a famous chapter entitled "The Negro and Language" that examines the specific psychic dynamics of the relationship between the Antillean Black person and the French language.

Fanon's central argument in this chapter is that the Antillean who speaks good French is rewarded with a kind of conditional inclusion in the dominant culture that is not available to those who speak Creole or speak French badly. This reward creates a perverse incentive structure: the aspiration to inclusion in the dominant culture through mastery of its language reinforces the cultural hierarchy that defines Creole and its speakers as inferior, and it produces in the aspiring speaker a split consciousness, divided between the desire for inclusion in the dominant culture and the awareness, always present even when suppressed, that this inclusion is conditional and incomplete.

Khan transposes this analysis to the Bangladeshi context with careful attention to the differences between the two situations. The colonial relationship between English and Bengali is not identical to the relationship between French and Creole in the Antilles: Bengali is a fully developed literary language with a rich classical tradition, not a creolized language developed in conditions of slavery. But the psychic structure that Fanon describes, the aspiration to cultural

inclusion through mastery of the dominant language, the conditional reward for this mastery, and the self-alienation that accompanies the devaluation of one's mother tongue, is present in the Bangladeshi context in forms that are recognizable even if they are not identical to the Antillean forms that Fanon analyzed.

Particularly important for Khan is Fanon's concept of the "colonized consciousness," the psychic formation produced by the systematic devaluation of the colonized culture and the elevation of the colonizer's culture. This formation does not disappear with the formal end of colonial rule. It persists in the post-colonial period in the habits, preferences, and aspirations of the educated classes, who continue to orient themselves toward the cultural standards set by the former colonizer long after political independence has been achieved. Khan's critique of what he calls the "colonial cringe" in Bangladeshi intellectual life, the tendency of educated Bangladeshis to regard English as the natural language of serious thought and to feel vaguely embarrassed by the suggestion that serious intellectual work can be done in Bengali, is directly derived from this Fanonian analysis.

40.4 The Lacanian Supplement: The Subject, Language, and Desire

The psychoanalytic dimension of Khan's philosophy of language goes beyond Fanon to engage directly with Lacan's structural theory of the subject's constitution through language. As we examined in Part Two, Lacan's fundamental thesis is that the human subject is constituted through its entry into the symbolic order, which is primarily the order of language. The subject does not first exist and then learn to use language. It comes into being as a subject precisely through its assumption of a place in the linguistic order, through its adoption of the signifiers that identify it in the social field.

This means that the language in which a subject is constituted is not merely a means of communication but the very medium of subjectivity itself. The subject who is constituted through Bengali, whose fundamental identifications, whose earliest experiences of desire and prohibition, whose deepest sense of what is real and what is possible, are structured by the Bengali language, is a different kind of subject from the one who is constituted through English. Not better or worse, but specifically different, carrying within their subjectivity the specific resonances, the specific way of cutting up reality, the specific emotional and aesthetic possibilities that Bengali makes available.

The educational system that requires the Bengali-constituted subject to think and work in English is therefore not merely imposing a practical inconvenience. It is demanding a kind of psychic splitting, a division between the language of the subject's constitution and the language of the subject's intellectual work, that has consequences not just for cognitive efficiency but for the integrity of the subject's relationship to their own intellectual production. Khan uses this Lacanian insight to explain what he regards as a characteristic feature of Bangladeshi intellectual life educated in English-medium institutions: a certain hollowness or inauthenticity in the relationship between the intellectual and their work, a sense that the ideas being expressed are borrowed rather than discovered, imported rather than generated, because the language in which they are expressed is not the language of the intellectual's deeper self.

This is a deliberately provocative claim, and Khan is aware that it can be challenged on both empirical and normative grounds. Empirically, there are many examples of thinkers who have done profound and genuine intellectual work in a language that was not their mother tongue: Samuel Beckett writing in French, Joseph Conrad in English, and many postcolonial thinkers who have done their most important work in European languages. Khan's response to this challenge is that these examples, while genuine, do not refute his general point but rather illustrate it from a different angle: Beckett's use of French was itself a philosophical act, a deliberate embrace of estrangement as a condition of literary production, and Conrad's English carries within it the traces of his Polish formation in ways that were both a source of his literary power and a locus of his personal anguish. The point is not that it is impossible to think genuinely in a non-native language, but that it is always, in one way or another, a charged and complex situation that demands acknowledgment rather than the casual assumption that language is simply a neutral medium.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE: THE BANGLADESHI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: COLONIAL INHERITANCE AND CLASS REPRODUCTION

41.1 Three Parallel Systems: The Structural Architecture of Bangladeshi Education

The Bangladeshi educational system is one of the most structurally complex in the world, because it consists of three essentially parallel and largely non-communicating systems that reflect different historical legacies, serve different social constituencies, and produce graduates with very different cultural orientations and labor market outcomes. Understanding these three systems and the relationships among them is essential for understanding both the sociological analysis and the political argument that Khan develops.

The first system is the Bengali-medium state system, which educates the vast majority of Bangladeshi children through primary and secondary school using Bengali as the medium of instruction. This system, despite decades of chronic underfunding, inadequate teacher training, and infrastructural neglect, remains the primary educational pathway for the children of the peasantry, the urban working class, and the lower sections of the lower-middle class. Its graduates are, theoretically, eligible to compete for positions in the Bangladesh Civil Service and other state institutions, but they compete at a systematic disadvantage because the competitive examinations for these positions, while conducted in Bengali, test knowledge and modes of thought that have been shaped primarily by English-medium educational exposure.

The second system is the English-medium private school system, which serves primarily the urban upper and upper-middle classes and which prepares students for the British O-Level and A-Level examinations that are internationally recognized as pathways to higher education in English-speaking countries. This system produces graduates who are comfortable working in English, who have often spent significant periods studying abroad, and who aspire to careers in the private sector, in international organizations, and in the global professional class rather than in the Bangladeshi state system. The cultural orientation of this system is explicitly cosmopolitan and implicitly deferential to the educational standards set by the former colonial power.

The third system is the madrasa system, which provides religious education to a substantial minority of Bangladeshi children, particularly in rural areas and among families for whom the public school system is geographically or economically inaccessible or culturally unsuitable. Within the madrasa system, there is an important internal distinction between the Aliya madrasa system, which is government-regulated and combines Islamic education with a curriculum that has some overlap with the state school system, and the Qawmi madrasa system, which is privately funded, independent of state regulation, and follows the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum developed in eighteenth-century India. The Qawmi system educates students primarily in classical Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, with Bengali used as the medium of instruction for Islamic studies.

Khan's analysis of this tripartite structure focuses on three overlapping dimensions. The first is the class dimension: the three systems serve different class constituencies and produce graduates with very different material outcomes, creating a structural link between educational pathway and class destination that systematically reproduces existing class inequalities. The second is the colonial dimension: the hierarchy among the three systems, with English-medium education at the apex and Qawmi madrasa education at the base, reflects and reproduces the colonial hierarchy of languages and cultures that British rule established. The third is the political dimension: the coexistence of three systems with such different cultural orientations creates conditions for the kind of cultural and political fragmentation that makes genuine democratic solidarity difficult and that has been exploited by political forces interested in mobilizing different educational communities against one another.

41.2 The Colonial Origins of Educational Stratification

The tripartite structure of Bangladeshi education did not arise spontaneously. It is the direct inheritance of the colonial educational system established by British rule in India, and understanding its colonial origins is essential for understanding both its current character and the possibilities for its reform.

The foundational moment in the colonial educational policy that shaped what is now Bangladesh was the Macaulay Minute of 1835, in which Thomas Babington Macaulay, serving as Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, made the case for English as the language of higher education in British India. Macaulay's arguments were simultaneously practical and ideological: practically, he argued that English-medium education would produce the class of educated Indians needed to staff the colonial administration; ideologically, he advanced the famous claim that a single shelf of good European literature was worth the entire native literatures of India and Arabia combined, and that the purpose of education was to produce a class of Indians "who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."

Khan's engagement with the Macaulay Minute is one of his most consistent and impassioned intellectual gestures. He returns to it repeatedly across his writings and lectures, not because he finds Macaulay particularly interesting as a thinker (he regards him as a fairly second-rate intellectual) but because the Macaulay Minute is so perfectly transparent an articulation of the colonial educational project: it states plainly what colonial education was for, and its stated

purposes were not the enlightenment or the empowerment of the educated Indians but the production of useful intermediaries for the colonial administration. The fact that nearly two centuries later the Bangladeshi educational system still contains, at its apex, a private school system that prepares students for British examinations, is for Khan a measure of how completely the colonial educational project has been internalized by the post-colonial ruling class.

The madrasa system has a different colonial history but an equally complex one. The Qawmi madrasa curriculum was in significant part a deliberate conservative response to colonial educational policy: the Islamic scholars who developed and preserved the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum in the colonial period were motivated by the desire to maintain an educational tradition independent of colonial influence and capable of reproducing Islamic scholarly culture in the face of British cultural domination. This makes the Qawmi madrasa system, paradoxically, both an expression of resistance to colonial cultural hegemony and a form of cultural conservatism that has its own problems from Khan's perspective.

His engagement with the Qawmi system is one of the most politically sensitive aspects of his educational analysis, because it requires him to simultaneously affirm the legitimacy of the system's independence from colonial educational norms and to raise serious critical questions about the intellectual formation it provides and the political uses to which it has been put. His endorsement in April 2017 of the government's decision to recognize the Dawra degree of the Qawmi system as equivalent to a master's degree reflected his judgment that integration of the Qawmi educational community into the national mainstream was a more progressive outcome than its continued marginalization, while his subsequent analysis has continued to insist on the importance of curriculum reform within the system.

41.3 The BCS Paradox: Meritocracy, Language, and Structural Disadvantage

One of the most concrete and analytically sharp dimensions of Khan's educational analysis is his examination of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination system and the structural disadvantage it creates for Bengali-medium graduates. This analysis has particular political resonance in the context of the July 2024 uprising, which was triggered in part by student protests about the quota system within the BCS, and Khan has developed it extensively in his public interventions since 2024.

The BCS is the competitive examination through which the Bangladeshi state recruits its administrative cadres. It is formally conducted in Bengali and is therefore, in principle, accessible to graduates of all three educational systems. In practice, however, the competitive examination tests modes of analytical reasoning, knowledge of global affairs and institutional structures, and skills of abstract argumentation that have been developed primarily in the English-medium educational tradition. Students educated in English-medium schools and at private universities where English is the medium of instruction are therefore structurally advantaged in the BCS, not because they are more intelligent or more capable than Bengali-medium graduates, but because their education has prepared them more specifically for the kind of cognitive performance that the examination rewards.

Khan's analysis of this structural disadvantage draws on the sociological framework developed by Pierre Bourdieu in his concept of "cultural capital." For Bourdieu, educational systems do not simply transmit knowledge. They reproduce and legitimate the cultural dispositions, habits of mind, and modes of expression that characterize the dominant class, and they convert this class-specific cultural inheritance into the appearance of natural intellectual ability. The examination system that appears to be a neutral test of ability is in reality a test of the extent to which a student has internalized the cultural dispositions of the dominant class, dispositions that are unequally distributed across social classes and that are transmitted primarily through family environment and educational experience rather than through the formal curriculum.

Khan uses Bourdieu's framework to analyze how the BCS examination system, despite its formally meritocratic character, functions in practice to reproduce class privilege by rewarding the cultural capital that has been accumulated primarily by students from advantaged backgrounds. The Bengali-medium graduate who has received an excellent education in terms of substantive knowledge but whose modes of reasoning and expression have been shaped by a different educational tradition is systematically disadvantaged by a system that confuses class-specific cultural dispositions with intellectual merit.

The specific relevance of the language question to this analysis was highlighted in Khan's April 2025 public intervention, when he lamented the relegation of Bengali-medium institutions to second- or third-tier status amid the rise of English-medium alternatives, linking it to systemic devaluation that hinders equitable access to civil service examinations like the BCS, where Bengali-medium graduates compete at a disadvantage. [The Daily Star](#) This is not simply a complaint about unfairness in a specific examination. It is a diagnosis of a structural feature of Bangladeshi class society that uses the educational system and the language hierarchy to naturalize and legitimize existing class inequalities.

41.4 The English-Medium Elite and the Crisis of National Solidarity

The English-medium educational system in Bangladesh has produced, over the decades since independence, a distinctive social formation that Khan analyzes with increasing concern: an educated elite whose cultural orientation is primarily cosmopolitan and international, whose primary reference points are global rather than national, and whose relationship to the Bengali language and culture is increasingly attenuated and mediated.

This elite is not, Khan insists, simply bad or morally inferior. Many of its members are genuinely talented, genuinely committed to the development of Bangladesh, and genuinely distressed by the corruption, inequality, and political dysfunction of Bangladeshi public life. But the cultural formation that their education has given them creates specific difficulties for the project of building the kind of democratic solidarity that genuine social transformation requires.

The difficulty is not primarily one of language competence: most members of the English-medium educated elite speak Bengali fluently and can function in Bengali when required. It is a difficulty of cultural orientation and political imagination. The English-medium educated elite tends to understand Bangladeshi problems through frameworks developed in and for the analysis of quite different societies, and to aspire to solutions that have worked in quite different contexts.

Its preferred institutional models are those of liberal democratic polities in the global North, its preferred economic models are those of the developmental states of East Asia or the neoliberal market economies of the Anglo-Saxon world, and its preferred cultural models are those of cosmopolitan urban modernity in its various global forms. The specific character of Bangladeshi society, its particular historical formation, its specific class structure, and the specific aspirations and resources of its majority population, tend to figure in this elite's political imagination as obstacles to development rather than as the starting point for a specifically Bangladeshi path to modernity.

Khan's critique of this orientation is not a simple anti-cosmopolitanism or a celebration of parochialism. He is himself one of the most intellectually cosmopolitan thinkers in Bangladesh, deeply engaged with European, American, African, and Caribbean intellectual traditions. His point is rather that genuine intellectual cosmopolitanism requires a firm local foundation. The person who is rooted in their own language and culture, who understands their own society from within rather than from the outside, is in a better position to engage productively with global intellectual currents than the person who has been culturally uprooted and who understands their own society primarily through the frameworks of another culture. Genuine universalism, in Khan's view, is achieved through the deepening of particularity rather than through its abandonment.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO: THE BANGLA ACADEMY: INSTITUTION, POLITICS, AND THE GOVERNANCE OF A LANGUAGE

42.1 The Bangla Academy: History and Mandate

The Bangla Academy was established in 1955, in the context of the language movement of the early 1950s, as the primary institution responsible for the development and promotion of the Bengali language in what was then East Pakistan. Its founding in the immediate aftermath of the language movement reflected the political demand that the Bengali language be given institutional support commensurate with its status as the mother tongue of the majority of Pakistan's population and the language of a rich and ancient literary tradition.

The Academy's formal mandate encompasses a wide range of activities: the development of a standardized Bengali orthography and vocabulary, the publication of dictionaries and encyclopedias, the promotion of Bengali literature through awards and publications, the translation of important foreign texts into Bengali, the organization of the annual Ekushey Book Fair (which has become the largest book fair in South Asia), and the general promotion of Bengali language and culture. It is a prestigious institution, and the Bangla Academy Literary Award, established in 1960, is the most important literary prize in Bangladesh.

Khan's relationship with the Bangla Academy is one of the most complex and productive intellectual relationships in his career. He has been consistently and sharply critical of the institution's failures and limitations while acknowledging its importance and the genuine need

for an institution of its kind. His criticisms are specific and substantive rather than simply institutional or political.

42.2 Khan's Critique of the Bangla Academy: Four Dimensions

Khan's critique of the Bangla Academy operates along four distinct dimensions, each of which illuminates a different aspect of his broader analysis of language, knowledge, and cultural politics.

The first dimension is the critique of the Academy's failure to translate important foreign intellectual works into Bengali. Khan has argued repeatedly that one of the most important functions that the Bangla Academy could perform, and consistently fails to perform, is the systematic translation into Bengali of the major works of contemporary philosophy, science, social theory, and literature. The absence of Bengali translations of foundational works of modern thought means that the Bengali language cannot function as a genuine vehicle of advanced intellectual discourse, because the intellectual community working in Bengali cannot engage with the primary texts on which that discourse is based. This is a self-reinforcing problem: because serious intellectual work cannot be done in Bengali without access to translated texts, serious intellectuals tend to work in English, and because serious intellectuals work in English, there is less demand for and less production of serious intellectual work in Bengali.

The second dimension is the critique of the Academy's orthographic conservatism. Bengali orthography is a complex and in some ways historically anomalous system, with numerous silent letters, multiple letters representing the same sounds, and distinctions between written and spoken forms that create significant barriers to literacy. Khan has engaged with the ongoing debate about orthographic reform, arguing that the Academy's resistance to meaningful simplification of Bengali orthography reflects a literary and cultural conservatism that privileges the interests of the educated elite (who have already mastered the complex orthography) over the interests of the population as a whole (who would benefit from a simpler system that made literacy more accessible).

The third dimension is the critique of the Academy's political instrumentalization. Khan has consistently identified the ways in which the Bangla Academy has been used as a political instrument by successive governments, with its leadership appointments, award decisions, and publication policies shaped by political considerations rather than intellectual merit. The Bangla Academy Literary Award, in particular, has been frequently criticized for reflecting the political alignments and patronage networks of the governing party rather than genuine assessments of literary quality.

The fourth dimension is the critique of the Academy's failure to engage with contemporary intellectual developments. Khan has argued that the Bangla Academy has been chronically unable to engage with the most significant developments in contemporary intellectual life, from the poststructuralist and postcolonial turns in the human sciences to the major developments in cognitive science, evolutionary biology, and political economy that have reshaped how we understand language, culture, and social organization. An institution charged with developing the

Bengali language as a vehicle of serious thought cannot fulfill that mandate if it is not itself engaged with the most serious thought of the age.

42.3 The Bangla Academy Award Controversy of 2024-2025: A Case Study in Cultural Politics

The events surrounding the Bangla Academy Literary Award for 2024 provide a vivid case study in the cultural politics that Khan has been analyzing for decades, and his position within those events is itself analytically illuminating.

In January 2025, the Bangla Academy announced ten winners of its Literary Award for 2024, with Salimullah Khan named in the Essays and Prose category. [Atlantic Council](#) However, amid allegations against certain nominees, the decision was suspended, and a revised list was subsequently issued. The confirmed recipients of the Bangla Academy Literary Award 2024 were Masud Khan for poetry, Subhasish Sinha for drama and theatrical literature, Salimullah Khan for essay and prose, GH Habib for translation, Muhammad Shahjahan Mia for research, Rezaur Rahman for science, and Syed Jamil Ahmed for folklore. [Wikipedia](#)

The announcement of the awardees had sparked controversy, leading to a suspension and a revised list. After much deliberation, seven writers finally received the Bangla Academy Literary Award 2024, presented by Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus at the inauguration of the Amar Ekushey Book Fair. [New Age](#)

Khan's response to the controversy, documented in several interviews and public statements in early 2025, was characteristically direct and theoretically pointed. He expressed dismay not primarily at the personal affront of the initial suspension but at what the entire episode revealed about the structure of cultural power in Bangladesh. His statement that "they humiliated us after giving the award" (reported in the press) reflects a specific institutional critique: the manipulation of a prestigious cultural award through political processes that the awarding institution was unable or unwilling to resist.

For Khan, the Bangla Academy Award controversy of 2024-2025 illustrates in miniature everything he has been arguing for decades about the relationship between cultural institutions and political power in Bangladesh. The Academy, which is supposed to be the autonomous guardian of Bengali literary culture, was unable to maintain the integrity of its own selection process in the face of political pressure. The result was not only a minor institutional embarrassment but a further erosion of the cultural authority that the Academy needs in order to perform its mandate. An institution that cannot protect its own award process from political manipulation is not a credible arbiter of cultural value, and its progressive loss of credibility has consequences for the broader project of developing Bengali as a serious intellectual language.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE: READING THE BENGALI CANON: LALON, TAGORE, NAZRUL, AND THE QUESTION OF TRADITION

43.1 The Importance of Canonical Engagement

One of the distinctive features of Khan's intellectual practice is his sustained engagement with specific figures from the Bengali literary and cultural tradition. This engagement is not the work of a literary critic in the conventional sense. Khan does not approach Bengali literary figures primarily as aesthetic objects, objects whose merit is to be assessed by formal literary criteria. He approaches them as intellectual and political figures whose work raises and addresses questions that are continuous with the questions he is himself addressing: questions about colonialism and resistance, about religious identity and cultural form, about the relationship between the intellectual and the people, and about the proper character of Bengali modernity.

His canonical engagements are simultaneously acts of recovery, of critique, of appropriation, and of creative misreading in the productive sense that Harold Bloom uses that term. He reads Bengali literary and intellectual figures through the lens of his Lacanian-Marxist framework, finding in their work dimensions that are not always visible to readers who approach them from within the conventional literary tradition, and drawing from them resources for the contemporary political and intellectual project he is engaged in. The results are sometimes controversial, always provocative, and consistently intellectually serious.

43.2 Lalon Shah: The Mystic as Social Critic

Lalon Shah (1774-1890), the legendary mystic poet and composer of the Baul tradition of Bengal, is one of the most celebrated figures in the Bengali cultural tradition and one about whom the most divergent claims have been made. Orthodox Islamic commentators have regarded him as a heretic. Bengali nationalists have claimed him as a figure of Bengali cultural distinctiveness against Islamic homogenization. Secular progressives have read him as a proto-rationalist critic of religious superstition. Spiritual seekers have treated him as an enlightened mystic in the Sufi tradition.

Khan's reading of Lalon refuses all these appropriations while drawing selectively on each of them. What he finds most significant in Lalon is not primarily the mystical content of his songs but their social and epistemological function. Lalon's songs, addressed to the mass of ordinary Bengali people in the vernacular language they actually used rather than in the Sanskrit or Arabicized elevated registers of the religious and literary establishments, were acts of democratization of spiritual and philosophical discourse. They made available to ordinary people, through the medium of song and performance rather than learned treatise, a mode of engaging with fundamental questions about human existence, social justice, and the proper relationship between the individual and the community, that was otherwise the exclusive preserve of educated elites.

Khan reads Lalon's critique of caste, of religious orthodoxy, and of the hypocrisy of the learned classes as a form of subaltern social criticism that anticipates, in its own vernacular and spiritual register, many of the critical insights of modern social theory. Lalon's famous songs questioning the significance of caste distinctions ("What nation is the man? Some say he is Hindu, some say he is Muslim") are, in Khan's reading, not simply expressions of mystical indifference to social

categories but sharp social criticisms that expose the arbitrary and class-serving character of the social distinctions that the religious and brahmanical establishments maintained.

The Lacanian dimension of Khan's reading of Lalon focuses on the concept of the "maner manush," the man of the heart or the inner self, that is central to Lalon's spiritual vocabulary. Khan reads this concept as Lalon's vernacular articulation of something structurally similar to what Lacan means by the subject: not the ego, the social person with a name and a place in the social hierarchy, but the subject of desire and unconscious experience that precedes and exceeds all social identifications. Lalon's insistence that the maner manush cannot be identified with any external social category, that it transcends caste, religion, gender, and social position, is for Khan a profound intuition about the nature of human subjectivity that the Western psychoanalytic tradition has had to develop through several generations of theoretical work.

43.3 Rabindranath Tagore: The Ambivalence of Greatness

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the central figure of modern Bengali literary culture, the Nobel laureate whose poetry, fiction, drama, and essays have defined the Bengali literary canon and whose influence on Bengali intellectual life is so pervasive that no subsequent Bengali writer or intellectual can entirely escape positioning themselves in relation to him. Khan's relationship with Tagore is one of the most complex and revealing aspects of his engagement with the Bengali literary tradition.

His position is neither the uncritical celebration that characterizes much mainstream Tagore commentary nor the simple dismissal that some Marxist critics have favored. It is a dialectical engagement that simultaneously affirms Tagore's enormous artistic and intellectual achievement and raises substantive critical questions about the political dimensions of his thought and his cultural politics.

Khan's most consistent critique of Tagore concerns his prescriptions on Bengali orthography. Tagore had strong views about the Bengali language and worked actively to reform its literary style, moving away from the Sanskritic classicism of the nineteenth century literary tradition toward a simpler, more natural prose style. But his prescriptions on orthography were, in Khan's view, often shaped by aesthetic preferences that reflected his own class position and his own specific aesthetic sensibility rather than by principled analysis of the language's needs. Khan has been particularly critical of certain orthographic choices that Tagore promoted and that the Bangla Academy subsequently institutionalized, arguing that they make Bengali harder to learn and less accessible to the majority of speakers without corresponding aesthetic or communicative benefits.

More significant politically is Khan's engagement with Tagore's position on the partition of Bengal in 1905 and on the swadeshi movement that arose in response. Tagore's ambivalent relationship with Bengali nationalism, his simultaneous celebration of Bengali cultural identity and his discomfort with the more strident forms of political nationalism that the swadeshi movement generated, reflects a tension in his thought between cultural particularity and cosmopolitan universalism that Khan finds both intellectually interesting and politically ambiguous. Tagore's famous resignation from his British knighthood after the Jallianwala Bagh

massacre of 1919 demonstrates his genuine anti-imperial convictions. But his opposition to what he saw as the excessive communalism and cultural chauvinism of some strands of Bengali nationalism also reflects a class perspective that was not always sensitive to the political demands of those Bengali people for whom national assertion was not a luxury of cultural self-expression but a political necessity.

Khan's book "Gariber Rabindranath" (Poor People's Rabindranath), which he edited in 2017, reflects his effort to recover the dimensions of Tagore's work that are most relevant to the concerns of ordinary people, to read Tagore against the grain of the elite aesthetic appreciation that has often domesticated his most radical insights. This editorial project is continuous with Khan's broader project of reading the Bengali canonical tradition not as a set of aesthetic monuments to be admired but as a body of intellectual and cultural work that raises and addresses questions of enduring political relevance.

43.4 Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Revolutionary as National Symbol

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), the "rebel poet" of Bengal who is the national poet of Bangladesh, is for Khan a figure of particular importance precisely because of the tension between his revolutionary political and cultural practice and the domesticated national symbolism into which official commemoration has converted him. Khan has written extensively on Nazrul, and his reading consistently emphasizes dimensions of Nazrul's work that the mainstream commemorative tradition tends to overlook or minimize.

Khan views Kazi Nazrul Islam as an anti-colonial and democratic thinker cherished dearly by the people of Bengal. [Wikipedia](#) This characterization might seem obvious given Nazrul's famous poems of political rebellion and his anti-British journalism, but it is in fact a specific interpretive choice that emphasizes different aspects of Nazrul's work than the mainstream tradition does. The mainstream tradition tends to emphasize Nazrul's cultural synthesis of Hindu and Muslim traditions, his use of both Sanskrit and Arabic-Persian vocabulary, and his celebration of Bengali cultural unity across religious lines. Khan's emphasis on Nazrul's anti-colonial and democratic dimensions foregrounds instead the explicit political radicalism of his poetry, the socialist and anarchist influences in his thought, and his passionate commitment to the rights of the poor and the dispossessed.

Khan's reading of Nazrul is also informed by his Lacanian-Marxist framework in specific ways. He reads Nazrul's famous poem "Bidrohi" (The Rebel), one of the most celebrated poems in the Bengali language, not primarily as an expression of individual psychological rebellion but as a performance of what it means to occupy the position of the revolutionary subject: the one who refuses the place assigned to them by the existing symbolic order and who asserts their right to create new terms for the naming of themselves and their world. The poem's extraordinary catalog of mythological and cultural references from both Hindu and Islamic traditions is, in this reading, not merely a display of Nazrul's syncretic cultural sensibility but a political act: a refusal to be contained within the identity categories that the colonial and communal order sought to impose.

The political use of Nazrul as a symbol of Bengali cultural unity, while not dishonest in itself, has in Khan's analysis often served to depoliticize the most radical dimensions of his work, to

convert a revolutionary into a cultural icon and a poet of rebellion into a symbol of national harmony. This conversion serves the interests of a cultural establishment that finds the rebellious energy of Nazrul's work more comfortable when it is aestheticized and historicized than when it is understood as making demands on the present. Khan's engagement with Nazrul is thus also a political act: a reclamation of the radical content of a revolutionary poet's work from the commemorative apparatus that has sought to contain it.

43.5 Ahmed Sofa: The Mentor and the Challenge

Ahmed Sofa (1943-2001), whose relationship with Khan we first examined in Part One, is the figure with whom Khan has the most complex and most personal intellectual engagement. Sofa was not a gentle mentor. He was, by all accounts, intellectually formidable, personally uncompromising, and capable of devastating criticism of those he regarded as intellectually dishonest or politically cowardly. His censure of Khan's first book was a formative experience that Khan has reflected on extensively, describing it as at once devastating and ultimately productive: devastating because it challenged the quality of his analysis at a moment when his intellectual confidence was still being formed, and productive because it forced him to raise his standards and to develop a more rigorous and more honest mode of intellectual engagement.

Khan's book "Ahmed Sofa Shanjibani" provides an expansive assessment of the works of Ahmed Sofa. It established him as the leading expert on Sofa. He also edited a collection of writings by Ahmed Sofa on Rabindranath Tagore. [Wikipedia](#)

Khan's assessment of Sofa is distinguished by what we might call its responsible admiration: an admiration that is genuine and deep but that does not slide into hagiography, that insists on engaging with the tensions and contradictions in Sofa's thought rather than smoothing them over. Sofa's nationalism, his sometimes sharp criticism of Indian cultural influence, and his complex relationship with Islam are all subjects on which Khan has engaged critically, insisting that genuine admiration requires honest intellectual engagement rather than uncritical celebration.

The specific contribution that Khan identifies as Sofa's most important is his analysis of what Sofa called the "colonial consciousness" of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia: the systematic internalization, by educated Bangladeshis, of the colonial hierarchy of cultures, with Bengali culture positioned below Indian culture (particularly Hindu Bengali culture centered on Kolkata) and Indian culture positioned below European culture. This analysis, which Sofa developed across a range of essays and novels, anticipated in a more intuitive and literary form many of the insights that Khan would develop more systematically through his engagement with Fanon, Lacan, and postcolonial theory. Khan's intellectual project can in this sense be understood as, among other things, a systematic theoretical elaboration of Sofa's foundational intuitions.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR: THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION: MAKING WORLD THOUGHT BENGALI

44.1 Translation as Political Act

Khan is, as we have noted at several points in this textbook, an active and prolific translator. His translations include works as diverse as Plato's dialogues, Baudelaire's poetry, Fanon's political essays, and Dorothee Solle's theological writings. This range is itself significant: it reflects a deliberate effort to bring into Bengali not just the most obviously "relevant" texts (from political theory and anti-colonial thought) but a broader range of the major intellectual and aesthetic achievements of world culture.

Khan's theory of translation, developed in occasional essays and in the practice of his own translations, draws on both the Benjaminian tradition discussed above and on the specific practical experience of translating between languages as different as Greek, French, and German on one side and Bengali on the other. His central conviction is that translation is not a secondary or derivative intellectual activity but a mode of primary intellectual engagement: the translator who works to render a genuinely difficult text in a target language must understand that text at a level of depth and precision that exceeds what is required for ordinary reading, because the translator must be able to identify the specific function of every significant word and phrase and find its equivalent in the target language.

The practice of translation also functions, in Khan's account, as a form of cultural critique. The attempt to render a foreign text in Bengali reveals, at the points of greatest difficulty, where the two languages and the two cultures they embody differ most significantly. These points of difficulty are intellectually illuminating: they identify places where Bengali does not have a ready equivalent for a foreign concept, and they thereby identify either places where Bengali needs to develop new vocabulary and new conceptual tools or places where the foreign concept itself needs to be critically examined and perhaps modified to fit the different assumptions of the Bengali intellectual context.

Khan's translations of Fanon are particularly significant in this regard. Fanon wrote in French, but his French was shaped by his formation in Martinique and by the specific encounter between French colonial culture and Antillean Black experience that produced his distinctive intellectual voice. Rendering Fanon in Bengali required Khan to think through not just the translation of French into Bengali but the translation of a colonial situation in the Antilles into a colonial situation in Bengal, finding the points of resonance and the points of divergence, and producing a Bengali Fanon that is genuinely illuminating for Bengali readers rather than simply a mechanical rendering of the French words.

44.2 The Dictionary Project and the Problem of Technical Vocabulary

One of the most concrete and practically important dimensions of Khan's advocacy for Bengali as a serious intellectual language is his engagement with the problem of technical vocabulary. Serious intellectual discourse in the contemporary world requires access to a large and precise technical vocabulary in specific fields, from philosophy and psychoanalysis to economics and jurisprudence. This vocabulary has been developed primarily in European languages, and it poses a specific challenge for the project of conducting serious intellectual work in Bengali.

There are, broadly speaking, three strategies for handling foreign technical vocabulary in a receiving language. The first is direct borrowing: simply adopting the foreign word, with more or

less phonological adaptation, into the receiving language. The second is loan translation or calque: translating the foreign word literally, element by element, using native morphemes. The third is semantic extension: using existing native words in extended or modified senses that cover the meanings of the foreign technical term.

Khan has engaged with the relative merits of these strategies in several essays, and his position is nuanced. He is not a purist who insists on native vocabulary at all costs: he acknowledges that direct borrowing is often the most practical and communicatively effective strategy for highly technical terms that do not have natural Bengali equivalents, and that the attempt to find or create native Bengali words for every foreign technical concept can produce baroque neologisms that are harder to learn and use than the borrowed terms they are meant to replace. But he is also critical of the tendency in some Bangladeshi intellectual circles to adopt English technical vocabulary wholesale without even attempting the translation work that would allow Bengali to develop its own technical resources.

His own practice as a translator demonstrates a middle path: he tends to prefer loan translation or semantic extension over direct borrowing where these strategies produce natural and usable Bengali expressions, but he does not hesitate to borrow or adapt when the native alternatives are forced or obscure. The result is a Bengali prose style that is technically precise without being artificially arcane, and that demonstrates in practice the proposition that Bengali can bear the full weight of serious contemporary intellectual discourse.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE: CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: THE DECEMBER 2024 CONFERENCE AND BEYOND

45.1 The December 2024 Conference: Language Evolution and the Stakes of Engagement

In December 2024, Khan participated in a conference on language evolution that became one of the most publicized recent examples of his public intellectual engagement on cultural and linguistic questions. At the December 2024 conference on language evolution, Khan reiterated the need to prioritize the mother tongue for inclusive accessibility, praising initiatives that align with this principle. [The Daily Star](#)

The conference provided an occasion for Khan to develop in a public and academically organized setting the arguments about language, education, and cultural politics that he has been developing across decades of writing and teaching. The specific context of 2024, the year of the July uprising and the beginning of the transition to a new political dispensation in Bangladesh, gave these arguments particular urgency: the post-uprising moment was, and is, a moment of genuine political possibility in which questions about the character of Bangladeshi institutions and the values that should animate them are genuinely open.

Khan's interventions at the December 2024 conference addressed several specific dimensions of the language evolution question. He engaged with the sociolinguistic research on the cognitive benefits of mother-tongue education, drawing on a body of scholarship that consistently shows

that children who are educated in their mother tongue in the early years of schooling achieve better outcomes on a range of academic measures than children who are educated in a second language from an early age. He engaged with the political economy of language: the ways in which the hierarchy of languages in Bangladesh is connected to the class structure of the society, and the ways in which language policy decisions have distributive consequences that go beyond purely cultural considerations. And he engaged with the philosophical questions about language and identity that we examined in Chapter Forty: the ways in which the language of education shapes not just cognitive style but the very character of subjectivity and social solidarity.

45.2 India, Language, and the Regional Politics of Culture

One of the most politically charged dimensions of Khan's cultural politics in 2024 and 2025 has been his engagement with the question of Indian cultural influence in Bangladesh and its relationship to the language question. In a December 3, 2024, interview, Khan asserted that India wants to keep Bangladesh as its colony using the excuse of its helping the country in its war of liberation in 1971, arguing that such narratives perpetuate dependency and undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. [The Daily Star](#)

This statement requires careful contextualization and critical engagement, because its rhetorical form, particularly the use of the word "colony," is deliberately provocative in ways that are designed to generate public debate rather than to make a precise analytical claim. What Khan is pointing to, with characteristic directness, is a set of structural features of the relationship between Bangladesh and India that he regards as incompatible with genuine Bangladeshi sovereignty: the asymmetric economic relationship in which Bangladesh is heavily dependent on Indian transit facilities and trade terms, the cultural influence of Indian media (particularly Hindi and Bengali language television programming from West Bengal) in Bangladeshi popular culture, and the political dimension of India's relationship with specific Bangladeshi political parties and formations.

On April 12, 2025, he criticized Indian claims of minority oppression in Bangladesh as tools to portray Bangladesh as unstable and in need of Indian oversight, dismissing them as unsubstantiated and as measures designed to legitimize external meddling. [The Daily Star](#)

The cultural dimension of this regional political argument is particularly important for Khan's broader analysis. The extensive penetration of Indian media, particularly West Bengali Bengali-language media, into Bangladeshi popular culture creates a specific dynamic in which Bangladeshi Bengali is being influenced, and in some domains displaced, by West Bengali Bengali norms. This influence operates not through overt coercion but through the soft power of media production: the fact that the most technically sophisticated, most heavily resourced, and most widely distributed Bengali-language media content is produced in West Bengal means that its linguistic norms, its cultural references, and its aesthetic standards tend to be treated as the standard against which Bangladeshi Bengali production is measured.

Khan's concern about this dynamic is not simply cultural protectionism or anti-Indian sentiment. It is connected to his broader analysis of the relationship between language, cultural sovereignty, and political independence. A Bangladesh in which the educated classes increasingly orient their

cultural life toward Indian media production, in which the Bengali language being used in the most prestigious cultural contexts is West Bengali Bengali rather than Bangladeshi Bengali, and in which the specific cultural and historical experiences of the Bangladeshi people are being processed through frameworks developed for and in the quite different context of West Bengal, is a Bangladesh whose cultural sovereignty is being eroded even as its political sovereignty is formally intact.

45.3 Digital Technology, Social Media, and the New Language Politics

The emergence of digital technology and social media as major forces in Bangladeshi cultural and intellectual life has created a new dimension of the language politics that Khan has been analyzing. The July 2024 uprising itself was significantly shaped and amplified by social media, with platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok serving as primary channels for the organization, documentation, and dissemination of the protests. Khan's analysis of the uprising has engaged with this digital dimension, though his primary focus has been on the political content of the uprising rather than its digital form.

The language politics of digital technology in Bangladesh are complex. On one hand, the democratization of content production that social media enables has been beneficial for Bengali: it has created a massive expansion of Bengali-language content production, with millions of Bangladeshis now producing and consuming text, audio, and video in Bengali on a daily basis. This expansion includes not just entertainment content but a growing body of educational, journalistic, and analytical content in Bengali that would not have been viable in the pre-digital media economy.

On the other hand, the digital platforms themselves are built on English-language foundations, their algorithms are calibrated primarily for English-language content, and their monetization systems favor content that can attract international advertising attention, which again tends to favor English. The most prominent Bangladeshi content creators on global platforms tend to be those who produce content in English or who combine Bengali and English in ways that attract both domestic and international audiences. The language politics of the digital economy thus replicate, in a new technical form, the same hierarchy that the colonial educational system established.

Khan's engagement with this dimension of the language question is still developing, and he has not yet produced the sustained analytical treatment of digital language politics that the subject deserves. What he has said in interviews and public statements reflects his characteristic combination of concern about the structural features of the digital economy and qualified optimism about the democratic possibilities that digital media creates for Bengali cultural production.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX: THE UNIVERSITY AS SITE OF STRUGGLE: HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

46.1 The University in Postcolonial Bangladesh: Between Mission and Market

The university, in Khan's analysis, is not simply an educational institution. It is a specific social institution with a specific history, a specific set of functions, and a specific set of tensions that are inseparable from its position within the broader structures of class society and colonial inheritance. Understanding the Bangladeshi university requires understanding both its inherited colonial structure and the new pressures that neoliberal globalization has placed upon it.

The university as an institution developed in medieval Europe as a community of scholars organized for the production and transmission of knowledge according to norms of intellectual integrity and collegial governance. This model was transplanted to the colonies in modified forms through the establishment of institutions like the University of Calcutta (1857) and the University of Dhaka (1921), which combined the organizational forms of the European university with specifically colonial educational missions: the production of educated intermediaries for the colonial administration, the dissemination of European knowledge as the standard of cultural achievement, and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems.

The University of Dhaka, where Khan received his legal education and where some of the most important intellectual movements of twentieth-century Bengal and Bangladesh were organized, occupies a special place in Khan's analysis. It was at Dhaka University that the language movement of 1952 was centered, that the student protests of the late 1960s that contributed to the political mobilization leading to the Liberation War were organized, and that the intellectual life of post-independence Bangladesh has been most significantly concentrated. But the University of Dhaka has also been, in Khan's analysis, a site of systematic political interference, intellectual mediocrity sustained by institutional conservatism, and the reproduction of class privilege through the management of scarce educational resources.

46.2 The Private University System and the Commodification of Higher Education

One of the most significant developments in Bangladeshi higher education since the 1990s has been the explosive growth of the private university system. The Private University Act of 1992 opened the door to the establishment of private universities, and the subsequent decades have seen the creation of over a hundred such institutions, ranging from a few institutions of genuine quality to a large number that are essentially degree mills with no serious commitment to academic standards.

Khan's analysis of the private university system is part of his broader critique of the marketization of higher education: the process by which the university is reconceived as a service provider selling educational products to student-consumers, rather than as a community of scholars committed to the pursuit and transmission of knowledge for the public good. This process, driven by the same neoliberal logic that has shaped economic policy across the global South since the 1980s, has specific consequences for the quality and character of higher education that Khan regards as deeply damaging.

The marketization of higher education tends to privilege those disciplines and programs that have immediate market relevance, that can promise graduates a quick return on their educational

investment in the form of higher salaries and better employment prospects. This tends to favor business, engineering, and information technology programs over philosophy, history, literature, and the social sciences, with consequences for the character of intellectual life that go beyond the distributional effects on different academic departments. A higher education system oriented primarily toward the production of market-ready graduates is a system that has abandoned the Humboldtian ideal of *Bildung*, the cultivation of the whole person as a thinking, feeling, and socially engaged member of a political community, in favor of the narrower conception of education as skills training.

Khan has taught at several private universities in Bangladesh, most prominently at ULAB where he directed the Centre for Advanced Theory, and at North South University where he currently holds a position in the Department of History and Philosophy. His experience within the private university system has given him firsthand knowledge of both its possibilities and its limitations. At ULAB, the Centre for Advanced Theory that he directed was an attempt to create within the private university system a space for the kind of interdisciplinary, theoretically sophisticated, and politically engaged intellectual work that the standard private university curriculum does not accommodate. The seminars, lectures, and publications that the Centre organized were an assertion that the university can be more than a credential factory, that it can be a site of genuine intellectual community and a contribution to public discourse.

46.3 The Quota System and the University as Site of Social Conflict

The university's role as a site of social conflict was dramatically illustrated by the events of July 2024, when student protests that began at the university campuses of Dhaka triggered a nationwide uprising. The quota system for government jobs, which reserved a substantial portion of positions for descendants of Liberation War veterans as well as for women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, was the immediate trigger for the protests.

Khan's analysis of the quota controversy situates it within his broader analysis of class, education, and the politics of meritocracy in Bangladesh. The quota system was established with genuinely progressive intent: to ensure that groups historically excluded from state employment would have guaranteed access to it. But over time, the system had developed in ways that created legitimate grievances, particularly the liberation war veterans' quota, which had expanded from its original three percent to thirty percent of positions and which was being interpreted in ways that effectively restricted it to persons connected to Awami League political networks.

The student protesters' demand for reform of the quota system was, in one sense, a demand for the more consistent application of meritocratic principles in state employment. But Khan's analysis resists reducing it to this. He reads the quota protests as an expression of a deeper frustration with the structural closure of opportunities for young people outside the political networks of the ruling party, and with the systematic gap between the formal commitments of the Bangladeshi state (to equal opportunity, to democratic governance, to the honoring of the liberation promise) and the lived experience of a generation of young people who found themselves unable to access the educational and economic opportunities that independence was supposed to guarantee.

The university campuses were not just the initial location of the protests. They were, in a more fundamental sense, the social formation that made the protests possible. The concentration of large numbers of young people in a shared institutional space, with shared grievances and a culture of political discussion and organization, created the social conditions for the kind of rapid mobilization that the July uprising exemplified. This is a dimension of the university's social function that Khan's analysis highlights: the university is not only a site for the production and transmission of knowledge but a site for the formation of political subjectivity and political solidarity.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN: TOWARD A BENGALI MODERNITY: SYNTHESIS AND VISION

47.1 What Is Bengali Modernity?

The phrase "Bengali modernity" might seem paradoxical: modernity, after all, is typically understood as a universal condition rather than a culturally specific one, and the conjunction of a cultural particular (Bengali) with a historical universal (modernity) raises immediate questions about whether the concept is coherent. Khan's answer to this challenge is one of the most philosophically interesting aspects of his cultural politics.

He begins from the premise that modernity is not in fact a single universal condition but a family of related but distinct historical formations that have developed differently in different parts of the world in response to different conditions, different inheritances, and different possibilities. The modernity of Western Europe, shaped by the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, is not identical to the modernity of East Asia, shaped by very different historical experiences of imperial formation, colonialism, and rapid industrialization. And neither of these is identical to the modernity of South Asia, shaped by the experience of British colonialism, the encounter between indigenous and Western intellectual traditions, the traumatic processes of partition and decolonization, and the specific challenges of nation-building in conditions of poverty and inequality.

Bengali modernity, as Khan understands it, is a specific variant of this South Asian modernity that has been shaped by the particular experiences of the Bengali people: the Bengali Renaissance of the nineteenth century, the language movement of the twentieth century, the Liberation War of 1971, and the ongoing struggle to build a just and democratic society in the specific conditions of Bangladesh. It is a modernity that is neither a simple imitation of Western modernity nor a simple rejection of it: it is a creative appropriation and transformation of global intellectual and cultural resources in the service of specifically Bengali aspirations and experiences.

The key word in that formulation is "creative." Bengali modernity is not a passive reception of global influences. It is an active, selective, and critical engagement with those influences, shaped by a clear sense of the specific problems and possibilities of Bengali historical experience and oriented toward a specific vision of the good society that is grounded in that experience. This is

what Khan means when he insists that serious intellectual work requires a firm local foundation: not the rejection of global perspectives but the insistence that those perspectives be engaged from a position of cultural confidence and critical intelligence rather than from a position of cultural subordination and colonial deference.

47.2 The Three Pillars of Bengali Intellectual Modernity

Khan's vision of Bengali modernity can be organized around three related commitments that emerge from his work across the domains we have examined in this Part.

The first commitment is to Bengali as the primary language of intellectual life. This means not only the use of Bengali for informal and journalistic writing but the development of Bengali as a full vehicle of serious intellectual discourse in all domains: philosophy, science, social theory, jurisprudence, economics. It means the systematic translation into Bengali of the major texts of world intellectual culture. It means the development of a Bengali technical vocabulary adequate to the demands of contemporary intellectual work. And it means the reform of educational institutions so that Bengali-medium education is not a mark of class disadvantage but a path to the highest levels of intellectual achievement.

The second commitment is to a critical appropriation of both indigenous and Western intellectual traditions. Bengali modernity cannot be built on a simple rejection of Western thought, because the most important tools available for understanding the world we actually inhabit, from Marxist political economy to Lacanian psychoanalysis to postcolonial theory, have been developed primarily in the Western intellectual tradition. But it also cannot be built on a simple acceptance of Western thought, because that tradition carries within it assumptions and biases shaped by the specific historical experience of Western domination and Western self-understanding that require critical scrutiny before they can be appropriated for non-Western purposes. The task is a dialectical one: engaging deeply with Western thought in order to identify both what is genuinely universal in it and what is culturally specific, appropriating the universal elements and transforming them through encounter with the specific conditions of Bengali historical experience.

The third commitment is to an organic relationship between the intellectual and the people. Bengali modernity cannot be built by a small elite of English-educated cosmopolitans conducting their intellectual work in isolation from the concerns and experiences of the majority of the population. It requires intellectuals who are genuinely rooted in and accountable to the mass of Bengali people, who conduct their intellectual work in a language that the people can access, who address the questions that the people's lives raise, and who understand their intellectual work as a contribution to the collective political project of building a just and democratic society.

47.3 The Challenge of 2025 and 2026: Opportunity and Danger

The political transition that began with the July 2024 uprising and the formation of the interim government under Muhammad Yunus has created a moment of genuine possibility for the educational and cultural reforms that Khan has been advocating. The removal of the Hasina government, with its systematic political manipulation of cultural institutions including the

Bangla Academy, has created an opening for the reform of those institutions along the lines that Khan has consistently advocated. The new political dispensation's commitment to institutional reform, however uncertain and contested, provides an opportunity to address some of the structural features of the Bangladeshi educational system that have most concerned Khan.

But Khan is characteristically cautious about this moment of possibility. The interim government's primary mandate is to oversee a transition to democratic elections, and its institutional reform agenda is necessarily limited in scope. More fundamentally, the structural features of the Bangladeshi educational system that Khan has identified as most problematic, the class hierarchy of the three educational tracks, the systematic disadvantaging of Bengali-medium graduates in the civil service examination system, the commodification of higher education through the private university system, and the persistent colonial hierarchy of languages, are not problems that can be addressed through the actions of any single government, however well-intentioned. They require sustained political commitment over many years, the development of new institutional models, and the cultivation of a public culture that values Bengali intellectual life in ways that the current culture, shaped by decades of colonial cringe and class self-interest, does not.

Khan's response to this situation, expressed in his public interventions throughout 2024 and 2025, is a combination of strategic engagement with the immediate political possibilities and long-term cultivation of the intellectual and cultural foundations that genuine Bengali modernity requires. He engages with immediate political questions, the quota system, the reform of the Bangla Academy, the language policy dimensions of educational reform, with the directness and urgency that the moment demands. But he also continues the longer-term work of translating important texts into Bengali, of engaging with the Bengali literary and cultural tradition, of developing the theoretical frameworks through which the specific character of Bengali historical experience can be understood, and of training a new generation of intellectuals who are equipped to continue this work.

CONCLUSION TO PART SIX: LANGUAGE AS POLITICS, CULTURE AS STRUGGLE

Part Six has examined the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We have traced the philosophical foundations of his advocacy for Bengali in the traditions of Humboldt, Benjamin, and Fanon, and in the specific psychoanalytic framework derived from Lacan. We have examined his analysis of the Bangladeshi educational system, tracing its colonial origins and its class-reproductive functions, and engaging with his specific arguments about the BCS examination system, the private university proliferation, and the politics of the quota system. We have analyzed his engagement with the Bangla Academy and the 2024-2025 award controversy as a case study in cultural politics. We have examined his critical engagements with Lalon, Tagore, Nazrul, and Ahmed Sofa, showing how these engagements constitute a sustained argument about the proper character of Bengali intellectual modernity. We have addressed his most recent public interventions on language, India-Bangladesh relations, and the possibilities opened by the post-uprising transition. And we have

concluded with his vision of Bengali modernity: rooted, critical, and oriented toward the democratic solidarity of the Bengali people.

Several themes from Part Six deserve particular emphasis as we turn toward Part Seven.

The first is the inseparability of cultural and political questions. Khan's engagement with language and education is not a retreat from politics into culture but an insistence that culture is itself a domain of political struggle, that the questions of what language we think in, what educational institutions we build, what literary traditions we cultivate, and what intellectual models we aspire to are political questions whose answers have material consequences for the distribution of power, opportunity, and dignity in the society.

The second theme is the importance of institutional criticism. Khan's critiques of the Bangla Academy, of the private university system, and of the colonial structure of Bangladeshi education are not abstract complaints. They identify specific institutional features that have specific social functions, and they point toward specific reforms that would make these institutions better serve their stated purposes and the interests of the population as a whole.

The third theme is the dialectical character of Khan's cultural politics. His advocacy for Bengali is not a simple cultural nationalism that rejects everything foreign. It is a dialectical position that insists on the importance of local cultural rootedness as a condition for productive engagement with global intellectual currents, and that understands the cultivation of Bengali intellectual life as a contribution to the diversity of the global intellectual tradition rather than a withdrawal from it.

Part Seven of this textbook will turn to Khan's analysis of communalism, religious extremism, and the politics of identity in Bangladesh, examining how the frameworks we have developed across Parts One through Six bear on one of the most urgent and dangerous challenges facing Bangladeshi society and the region more broadly.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART SIX

Key Concepts in Language and Cultural Politics

Linguistic Relativity (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis): The hypothesis, associated with American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, that the language a person speaks influences the structure of their thought and their perception of the world. The strong version of the hypothesis, claiming that thought is determined by language, is generally rejected by contemporary linguists. The weak version, claiming that language influences thought in significant ways without determining it, has substantial empirical support.

Weltansicht: German for "worldview," used by Wilhelm von Humboldt to describe the specific way of organizing and experiencing reality that each language embodies. Humboldt's concept

implies that languages are not simply different codes for the same pre-linguistic reality but different ways of constituting reality as an object of human experience.

Cultural Capital: Pierre Bourdieu's concept for the non-financial assets, including educational qualifications, knowledge, and cultural competences, that individuals acquire through their upbringing and education and that confer social advantages. Bourdieu argued that cultural capital functions to reproduce class inequalities by making class-specific cultural dispositions appear as natural intellectual ability.

Bildung: German concept for education as the cultivation of the whole person, associated particularly with Humboldt and with the tradition of German idealist philosophy. Bildung is contrasted with Ausbildung (professional training), and the Humboldtian ideal of the university is that it should be organized around Bildung rather than around the production of market-ready graduates.

The Macaulay Minute (1835): The influential policy document written by Thomas Babington Macaulay, advocating that English rather than Sanskrit or Arabic should be the medium of higher education in British India. The Minute is a foundational document in the colonial history of Indian education and a primary target of Khan's analysis of the colonial cringe.

Loan Translation (Calque): A strategy for handling foreign vocabulary in which the foreign word is translated element by element using native morphemes, rather than being borrowed directly. German provides many examples of loan translation from Latin and French; "Weltkrieg" (world war) is a calque of the French "guerre mondiale."

Mother-Tongue Education: The educational policy of using children's first language as the medium of instruction, particularly in the early years of schooling. Research consistently shows that mother-tongue education improves learning outcomes, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, but it requires significant investment in the development of teaching materials and teacher training in the relevant languages.

The Dars-e-Nizami: The curriculum of Islamic studies developed in eighteenth-century India, primarily associated with the Firangi Mahal institution in Lucknow, and now used as the basis for Qawmi madrasa education in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and among Muslim communities in many other countries. The curriculum emphasizes classical Arabic, Persian, Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith studies, and Islamic philosophy.

Discussion Questions for Part Six

1. Khan argues that the language of education shapes not just cognitive style but the character of subjectivity itself, drawing on Lacan's theory of the subject's constitution through language. Do you find this psychoanalytic argument for mother-tongue education persuasive? What are the strongest objections to it, and how might Khan respond to those objections?
2. The three-track Bangladeshi educational system, consisting of the Bengali-medium state system, the English-medium private system, and the madrasa system, serves different

class constituencies and produces graduates with very different cultural orientations and material outcomes. Is the solution to this structure a single unified system, or is there value in maintaining multiple educational pathways? What would a reformed version of the three-track system look like that was more equitable and less class-reproductive?

3. Khan has been consistently critical of the Bangla Academy's failures, including its failure to translate important foreign texts, its orthographic conservatism, and its susceptibility to political manipulation. The 2024-2025 award controversy provides a recent example of these failures. What institutional reforms would be needed to make the Bangla Academy a more effective and more autonomous guardian of Bengali intellectual culture?
4. Khan's engagement with Tagore is simultaneously admiring and critical, affirming Tagore's enormous achievement while raising substantive questions about his orthographic prescriptions and his ambivalent relationship with Bengali nationalism. How should we understand the relationship between a thinker's aesthetic achievement and their political positions? Does it make sense to "read Tagore against the grain," as Khan does, in order to recover dimensions of his work that the dominant commemorative tradition has suppressed?
5. Khan advocates for Bengali as the primary language of Bangladeshi intellectual life while himself being deeply engaged with European theoretical traditions and working in a global intellectual community that primarily uses English. Is there a tension between these two aspects of his intellectual practice? How does he resolve it, and do you find his resolution convincing?
6. The July 2024 uprising was significantly shaped and amplified by social media, which has become a major new dimension of Bangladeshi cultural and political life. What are the implications of digital technology and social media for the language politics that Khan has been analyzing? Does social media tend to strengthen or weaken the position of Bengali relative to English in Bangladeshi cultural life?
7. Khan's vision of Bengali modernity emphasizes the importance of an organic relationship between intellectuals and the people. What does this mean in practice? What would it look like for the Bangladeshi intellectual community to develop a genuinely organic relationship with the mass of the Bengali population, and what obstacles stand in the way of developing such a relationship?

Extended Reading List for Part Six

On the Philosophy of Language: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language*; Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (in *Illuminations*); and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, for the analytic tradition's engagement with language and meaning.

On Colonial Language Policy and Its Consequences: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, the most powerful argument for writing in African languages made by an African writer who actually practiced it; Frantz Fanon, "The Negro and Language" (in *Black Skin, White Masks*); and Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*.

On the Sociology of Education: Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, the foundational text of the sociology of education as cultural

reproduction; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the most influential account of education as either a tool of domination or a tool of liberation.

On Bengali Language and Literature: Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (for Tagore's own philosophical account of his cultural vision); Ahmed Sofa, selected essays (available in Bengali; translations into English are limited); and Kazi Nazrul Islam, *Selected Poems*, for primary engagement with the texts that Khan discusses.

On the Madrasa System: Yoginder Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers: Madrasas and Islamic Education in India, and Madrasa Education in Bangladesh*, for scholarly analysis of the system that Khan engages with in his educational analysis.

On the Bangladeshi Educational System: Manzoor Ahmed, ed., *Primary Education for All: Learning from the BRAC Experience*, for an account of non-governmental educational innovation in Bangladesh that provides context for Khan's analysis of the state system's failures.

On Translation Theory: Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, the most influential contemporary account of translation theory and practice that engages with the politics of translation across cultural and power differentials.

End of Part Six

Part Seven: Communalism, Religious Extremism, and the Politics of Identity: Understanding the Crisis of Secular Democracy in Bangladesh will follow.

PART SEVEN: COMMUNALISM, RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM, AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Understanding the Crisis of Secular Democracy in Bangladesh

PART COORDINATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART SEVEN

Part Six of this textbook examined Salimullah Khan's engagement with language, culture, and the politics of Bengali intellectual life. It traced his advocacy for Bengali as the primary medium of thought and education in Bangladesh, his critique of the colonial cringe that produces deference to English, his analysis of the Bangladeshi educational system's class-reproductive structure, and his vision of what a genuine Bengali intellectual modernity might look like. We concluded with an examination of how the political transition that followed the July 2024 mass uprising had opened certain possibilities for the cultural and educational reforms Khan has long advocated, while also creating new dangers and uncertainties that his characteristic combination of strategic engagement and long-term intellectual cultivation is designed to address.

Part Seven turns to what is perhaps the most urgent and politically dangerous set of questions in Bangladeshi public life: the questions of communalism, religious extremism, and the politics of identity. These questions are, in the most literal sense, questions of life and death. The violence that has accompanied communal tensions in Bangladesh and across South Asia has killed people, destroyed communities, and poisoned the political atmosphere in ways that are difficult to overstate. The rise of religious extremism, in various organizational forms and ideological registers, poses challenges to democratic governance, to the rights of minorities, and to the basic premise of a politics organized around the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that Khan identifies as the founding principles of Bangladesh's Liberation War.

Khan has engaged with these questions with a consistency and depth that mark them as central to his intellectual project. His analysis of communalism spans three decades of writing and public intervention, from his early engagements with the history of communalism in colonial Bengal through his sustained criticism of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam formations, to his interventions in the intense debates that followed the July 2024 uprising about the relationship between the revolution's achievements and the communal violence against Hindu minorities that accompanied the fall of the Hasina government.

Part Seven is organized around several interlocking themes. We begin with a close examination of Khan's historical analysis of communalism, tracing his account of its colonial origins and its subsequent development through the partition of 1947 and the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. We then turn to his analysis of the specific ideological formations that carry communalist politics in contemporary Bangladesh, paying particular attention to Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam. We examine his engagement with the Shahbagh movement of 2013 as a case study in the tensions between secular democratic politics and religious identity politics. We analyze his treatment of the Rohingya question as a window into his broader thinking about communalism, displacement, and regional geopolitics. We address his critique of Indian proto-colonialism and its relationship to the question of minority protection in Bangladesh. We examine his response to the July 2024 uprising and its aftermath, including the outbreak of communal violence against Hindu communities. And we conclude with an extended analysis of his theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between religion, secularism, democracy, and social justice in a postcolonial Muslim-majority society.

Throughout this part, we will find Khan's characteristic analytical method at work: the combination of historical specificity, theoretical sophistication, and political urgency that marks his best work. We will find him insisting, against the simplifications of both secular fundamentalism and religious nationalism, on the complexity of the relationship between religious identity and political life in Bangladesh. We will find him deploying Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts to illuminate the irrational dimensions of communalist identification, even as he insists on the material and historical conditions that make such identification politically powerful. And we will find him, as always, maintaining that the ultimate standard by which any political formation must be judged is its relationship to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that he takes to be the animating values of the Bangladeshi national project.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT: THE COLONIAL MANUFACTURE OF COMMUNALISM

48.1 What Is Communalism? A Conceptual Starting Point

Before examining Khan's analysis of communalism in detail, we need to establish a clear conceptual understanding of the term itself. As Khan has pointed out in his landmark interview with *The Daily Star*, the word "communalism" is genuinely unusual in the English language: it is, in his memorable formulation, a special gift of India to the English vocabulary, signifying something in the South Asian context that is quite different from what it means elsewhere.

In North American English, "communal" carries positive connotations: it suggests sharing, cooperation, and collective living. A "commune" is a place of voluntary collective life; "communal living" describes arrangements of shared resources and shared responsibility. The term derives from the Latin "communis," meaning common or shared, and in its standard English usage it evokes the progressive tradition of cooperative social organization.

In South Asian English, by contrast, "communalism" refers to the political mobilization of religious community identity in ways that create antagonism between communities and undermine the possibility of a common civic life across religious lines. A "communal riot" is a riot between Hindus and Muslims, or between Muslims and Buddhists, or between any two religiously defined communities. A "communal politician" is one who exploits religious identity to win elections. A "communal organization" is one that claims to represent the interests of a specific religious community against other communities. The term, in its South Asian usage, is almost invariably negative: it describes a pathology of political life that reasonable people are expected to oppose.

This semantic difference is not merely a curiosity of translation. It reflects a deeper conceptual point that Khan insists upon: communalism is not the natural expression of religious community life but a specific political formation, historically produced, that transforms religious identity into a vehicle for political mobilization and social antagonism. Understanding communalism requires understanding how this transformation occurred, which means understanding the historical conditions under which it was produced. And for Khan, as for most serious students of South Asian history, the primary site of production of communalism in its modern South Asian form is the British colonial state.

48.2 The British Colonial State and the Production of Community

Khan's historical analysis of communalism begins with the colonial state and its particular techniques of governance. The British administration of India developed a distinctive approach to managing the diversity of the Indian population: the enumeration, categorization, and administration of the population through the lens of religious community. This approach was not, of course, purely cynical or intentional in its communalist effects; it reflected the genuine administrative challenges of governing an enormous and diverse population with limited personnel and resources. But its consequences were profound.

The census is perhaps the most important instrument through which the colonial state produced religious community as a political category. Before the regular decennial censuses that began in 1872, the detailed statistical enumeration of the Indian population by religious identity did not exist. The census created, for the first time, a precise and politically legible accounting of how many Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and other religious communities existed in each district, province, and region of the subcontinent. This enumeration had immediate political consequences: it made religious community a measurable, mappable, and therefore governable unit of political life.

The consequences for Bengal were particularly significant. Bengal had always been characterized by an intimate intermingling of Hindu and Muslim communities: the two communities lived in the same villages, worked the same fields, participated in each other's festivals, and shared a common Bengali cultural life that was irreducible to any single religious tradition. The syncretistic tradition of Bengal, represented most powerfully by the Baul and Fakir traditions and by figures like Lalon Shah, expressed a vision of spiritual life that explicitly transcended the boundaries of formal religious identity. Lalon Shah himself refused to identify as either Hindu or Muslim, insisting that the divine could not be captured by any institutional religious form.

The census disrupted this cultural pattern by insisting on a precise and exclusive identification of every individual with a single religious community. You were either Hindu or Muslim; you could not be both; and your identity in the census records defined your legal status, your relationship to political representation, and increasingly your economic interests as they were mediated through the colonial state. The Bengal census figures showed that the eastern districts of Bengal were Muslim-majority, while the western districts were Hindu-majority, and this demographic fact became the basis for a series of political decisions that had profound consequences for the region's future.

Khan traces the next crucial step in the colonial production of communalism to the specific policies of the British administration regarding access to education, government employment, and legal rights. The Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century was overwhelmingly a Hindu Bengali phenomenon, centered in Calcutta and shaped by the specific educational and economic opportunities that the colonial state offered to the Hindu *bhadralok* or respectable middle class. The Muslim peasantry of East Bengal was largely excluded from these opportunities, for reasons that were partly a matter of British policy (the decision to use English and Sanskrit as the primary media of higher education, which disadvantaged Muslims who had traditionally been educated in Persian and Arabic), partly a matter of economic structure (the predominantly rural and peasant character of the Muslim population in eastern Bengal, which gave them fewer opportunities to access the new forms of education and employment that the colonial economy created), and partly a matter of cultural disposition (the resistance of many Muslim scholars to what they saw as the corrupting influence of Western secular education).

This exclusion produced a specific Bengali Muslim consciousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: a consciousness of relative disadvantage, of being behind the Hindu Bengalis in education and economic opportunity, and of needing to organize politically to catch up. The formation of the Muslim League in 1906, which took place in Dhaka at a meeting

convened largely by Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka (from whom the Salimullah Muslim Hall at Dhaka University takes its name, a historical resonance not lost on the theorist Salimullah Khan), was one expression of this consciousness. The Muslim League's founding was intimately connected to the Partition of Bengal in 1905, which created a Muslim-majority province of Eastern Bengal and Assam that briefly seemed to offer Bengali Muslims a political unit in which they would not be perpetual minorities.

The annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, under pressure from Hindu Bengali nationalists, was experienced by many Bengali Muslims as a betrayal: evidence that Hindu political power in Bengal would always override Muslim political interests when the two came into conflict. This experience reinforced the tendency to organize politically along religious community lines, since the alternative, a common Bengali political identity, seemed to offer Bengali Muslims few guarantees.

Khan's analysis of this history is careful to resist two equally misleading oversimplifications. The first is the secular nationalist narrative that presents communalism as purely a colonial imposition, as if Hindu-Muslim relations in pre-colonial Bengal had been characterized by an undifferentiated harmony that British policy deliberately destroyed. This narrative is not entirely false, but it is too simple: it ignores the genuine tensions and structural inequalities that existed between Hindu and Muslim communities in Bengal before colonialism, and it fails to account for the ways in which communalist politics drew on real grievances and real material interests rather than being purely manufactured from above.

The second oversimplification is the communalist narrative, found in different versions in both Hindu nationalist and Islamic nationalist traditions, that presents the religious communities of Bengal as naturally separate and antagonistic, as if their history of coexistence were a surface phenomenon concealing a deeper natural enmity. This narrative is not merely false but actively dangerous: it reads the products of specific historical processes back into the nature of the communities themselves, naturalizing divisions that are in fact contingent and produced.

Khan's position is that communalism is a historically specific political formation, produced under specific conditions and serving specific interests, but that it has genuine roots in real economic and political inequalities that cannot be wished away by invoking an idealized pre-colonial harmony. The solution to communalism is not a return to an imagined past but the construction of a genuinely democratic political order that addresses the material inequalities and political exclusions that communalism feeds on.

48.3 The 1905 Partition, the 1911 Annulment, and the Deepening of the Communal Divide

The twin events of the 1905 Partition of Bengal and its 1911 annulment deserve extended attention in any account of the history of communalism in Bengal, because they mark a decisive turning point in the relationship between Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim political consciousness. Khan's analysis of these events draws on his deep familiarity with the historical scholarship on colonial Bengal, and it produces a reading that is both more nuanced and more disturbing than either the standard nationalist or the standard revisionist accounts.

The 1905 Partition, as Khan emphasizes, was justified by the colonial administration in administrative terms: the Bengal Presidency had become, it was argued, too large to be effectively governed as a single unit, and dividing it would allow for more efficient administration. But the political logic of the partition was transparent to contemporaries on all sides. The creation of a Muslim-majority eastern province changed the political arithmetic of Bengal in ways that Hindu nationalists found threatening and that Muslim political leaders found promising. The partition was celebrated by the Muslim League and denounced by the Indian National Congress, and the patterns of political mobilization that formed around it established templates that would recur throughout the subsequent history of South Asian politics.

The annulment of the Partition in 1911, which Khan analyzes with particular care, is important not only as a historical event but as a revelation of the political power relations that underlay apparently administrative decisions. The annulment was secured through an intensive campaign of protest, primarily organized by the Hindu bhadralok of Calcutta, whose economic and cultural interests were threatened by the prospect of a Muslim-majority province in the east. The campaign of Swadeshi nationalism, boycotting British goods in favor of Indian-made products, the wave of terrorist activity that accompanied it, and the sustained cultural mobilization around the figure of the Mother Bengal, *Bande Mataram*, were all part of a political effort that ultimately succeeded in reversing a government decision.

The lesson drawn by many Muslim political leaders from the annulment was unambiguous: when Hindu and Muslim political interests came into conflict, the colonial state would ultimately side with Hindu interests, because Hindu political mobilization was more powerful and more effectively connected to the mainstream of Indian nationalist politics. Whether this reading was entirely accurate is debatable, but its political consequences were very real. The annulment of the Partition deepened Muslim Bengali resentment of Hindu Bengali political dominance and strengthened the case for Muslim political organization along communal lines.

Khan's broader argument about the colonial period is that the British administration, without necessarily intending to create permanent communal antagonism, created the structural conditions that made communalist politics rational and even necessary for the Muslim minority of British India. By treating religious community as the primary unit of political representation, by creating systems of separate electorates that required Muslim candidates to appeal primarily to Muslim voters, by managing Hindu-Muslim relations as relations between competing interest groups rather than as the internal dynamics of a single political community, the colonial state made communalism the primary idiom of Muslim political self-expression.

48.4 The Permanent Settlement, Class, and the Muslim Peasantry

Khan's account of colonial communalism is distinguished from many other accounts by its insistence on the connection between communal politics and class structure. The tendency in both secular nationalist and religious nationalist historiography is to treat communalism as primarily an ideological phenomenon, produced by intellectual and political elites who manipulate religious sentiment for their own purposes. Khan does not deny this manipulative dimension, but he insists that communalism cannot be understood without reference to the

material conditions that make it politically effective, which means understanding the class structure of colonial Bengali society.

The Permanent Settlement of 1793, which created a new form of landlordism in Bengal by guaranteeing the zamindars permanent ownership of their land in exchange for a fixed revenue payment to the colonial state, had profound consequences for the class structure of Bengal and for the relationship between religious community and class position. The zamindars of Bengal were predominantly Hindu, and the peasantry that worked the land under them was predominantly Muslim. This was not an absolute pattern, and there were important exceptions, but as a statistical generalization it reflected a real structural feature of colonial Bengali society.

The consequence of this structure was that the economic exploitation of the Muslim peasantry by the Hindu landlord class took on a communal coloring that made economic grievances and communal grievances difficult to disentangle. When a Muslim peasant resisted the demands of a Hindu zamindar, his resistance could be understood both as a class conflict (tenant against landlord) and as a communal conflict (Muslim against Hindu). When communal riots broke out, as they did with increasing frequency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the economic dimension of the conflict was rarely absent, even when it was expressed in the idiom of religious difference.

Khan does not use this analysis to excuse communalist violence or to reduce it to economic conflict. He insists that communalism has a specific ideological logic that is not simply reducible to class interest, and that the manipulation of communal sentiment by political elites has consequences that go well beyond the economic interests that initially motivate it. But he does insist that any account of communalism that ignores its material foundations, that treats it as a purely cultural or psychological phenomenon, is inadequate and ultimately serves the interests of those who benefit from the class structures that communalism feeds on.

This insistence on the material foundations of communalism is one of the places where Khan's Marxism is most productively at work. Against the culturalist tendency in some versions of postcolonial theory, which can make it seem as if colonial discourse and colonial representation are the primary determinants of colonial subjects' experience, Khan insists on the irreducible importance of the material conditions of economic exploitation and political exclusion. Communalism, for Khan, is not primarily a problem of misrecognition or false consciousness; it is a problem of the real social conditions that make communalist identification a rational response to economic and political powerlessness.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE: THE PARTITIONS OF 1947 AND THEIR AFTERMATH

49.1 The Logic of Partition

The partition of British India in 1947 is, for any serious student of South Asian communalism, the central historical event around which all subsequent analysis must be organized. It is the event that gave communalism its ultimate political expression and its most devastating human

consequences. It is also the event that most clearly illustrates the limits of communalist politics: the partition was supposed to solve the communal problem by creating separate states for Hindus and Muslims, but it solved nothing; it produced instead new configurations of communal tension, new minorities in each of the new states, and new forms of communal violence that would persist for decades.

Khan's analysis of the partition draws on a wide range of historical scholarship, from the foundational works of Joya Chatterji and Gyanendra Pandey to the more recent contributions of Yasmin Saikia and Urvashi Butalia. His interpretation is shaped by his particular position as a Bengali Muslim intellectual: he views the partition not from the perspective of the all-India nationalist movement or the Pakistan movement, but from the specific perspective of the people of Bengal, who experienced it as a catastrophe that divided their linguistic and cultural community along religious lines and set in motion a series of forced migrations, communal massacres, and political upheavals that would not fully play out for decades.

The partition of Bengal in 1947, unlike the partition of Punjab, is relatively poorly represented in the popular historical memory of South Asia. The massacres in Punjab, which killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions, have received extensive attention in historical and literary accounts. The violence in Bengal, while less intense in the immediate period of partition, was in some ways more prolonged and more structurally damaging: it was not a single catastrophic event but a series of waves of communal violence and forced migration that continued from 1947 through 1950 and beyond, displacing millions of Hindus from East Bengal (which became East Pakistan) and millions of Muslims from West Bengal.

Khan emphasizes two aspects of the Bengal partition that distinguish his analysis from standard accounts. The first is the role of the Hindu Bengali intelligentsia in supporting the partition of Bengal, even though this meant accepting the division of the very cultural and linguistic community whose unity they celebrated in their cultural nationalism. The leading figures of the Indian National Congress in Bengal, including Sarat Bose's brother Subhas Bose's political heirs and Bidhan Chandra Roy, ultimately chose the creation of a Hindu-majority West Bengal over the possibility of a united independent Bengal, despite the fact that several leaders including Sarat Bose and Abul Hashim had briefly explored the possibility of a united, independent Bengal with a coalition of Muslim League moderates. This choice, which reflected the deeper communalism embedded in the secular nationalism of the Hindu *bhadralok*, is one that Khan returns to repeatedly as evidence that communalism was not a pathology confined to the Muslim League.

The second aspect that Khan emphasizes is the experience of the Muslim peasantry of East Bengal, who experienced the partition not simply as a communal victory but as a complex and ambiguous event that solved some problems while creating new ones. The creation of East Pakistan gave the Muslim peasantry of Bengal a state in which they were no longer a minority subject to Hindu zamindar domination. The zamindari system was abolished in East Pakistan in 1950, a reform that genuinely benefited the Muslim peasantry. But East Pakistan also placed the Bengali-speaking Muslims of the east under the political and economic domination of a West Pakistani ruling class that spoke Urdu, not Bengali, and that had no more interest in the welfare of the Bengali peasantry than the Hindu zamindars had had.

This is the structural irony at the heart of Pakistani political history that Khan explores in his analysis of the Language Movement of 1952 and the eventual emergence of Bangladesh: the communal logic of the Pakistan movement, which was supposed to solve the problem of Muslim minority status in India, reproduced the problem in a new form as soon as Pakistan was created. Bengali Muslims found themselves a majority within their own province but a minority within the Pakistani state, and their cultural and linguistic identity was once again threatened, this time not by Hindu nationalism but by Urdu-speaking Pakistani nationalism.

49.2 The Language Movement and the Founding of a National Consciousness

The Language Movement of 1952, which Khan analyzes with the depth and care that its historical importance demands, is the foundational event of Bangladeshi national consciousness. It is the moment at which the specifically Bengali dimension of the Bengali Muslim identity began to assert itself against the Islamic dimension, producing the distinctive synthesis of linguistic and cultural nationalism with a broadly secular, democratic political orientation that would characterize the mainstream of Bangladeshi politics through 1971 and beyond.

The decision of the government of Pakistan to declare Urdu as the sole national language, even though Bengali was spoken by a majority of the population of Pakistan, was experienced by Bengali-speaking Muslims as a direct attack on their cultural identity. It resonated with memories of the colonial period, when English had been imposed as the language of higher education and administration, displacing Persian and Arabic (the classical languages of Muslim education in Bengal) and marginalizing Bengali. The resistance to the imposition of Urdu drew on the same emotional and political resources as the earlier resistance to English: the deeply felt commitment to Bengali as the authentic medium of the community's spiritual and cultural life.

The martyrs of 21 February 1952, the students who were killed by police while protesting the language decision, became the founding figures of a specifically Bangladeshi national consciousness. Their sacrifice established the principle that linguistic and cultural identity is worth dying for, and that the claims of political authority do not override the claims of cultural self-expression. This is a principle with implications that go beyond the specific question of language policy: it establishes the priority of the democratic will of the people over the decisions of ruling elites, and it grounds that democratic will not in the abstract principles of liberal political theory but in the concrete cultural particularity of the Bengali community.

Khan's reading of the Language Movement is characteristically dialectical. He celebrates it as the founding moment of Bengali political consciousness, but he also insists on understanding it in its full complexity. The movement was not simply a nationalist assertion; it was also a class conflict, pitting the Bengali-speaking Muslim professional class and students against a West Pakistani ruling elite that was using language policy to consolidate its control over the state apparatus. It was a cultural assertion, but it was also a political claim to participation in the governance of the state to which Bengali speakers belonged. And it was, in ways that would only become fully apparent later, the first moment in the eventual emergence of a separate Bangladeshi national identity.

49.3 The Class Character of Pakistani Nationalism and Its Discontents

Khan's analysis of the Pakistani period of Bangladeshi history is organized around the concept of internal colonialism: the idea that the relationship between West Pakistan and East Pakistan reproduced, in a new form, the colonial relationship between the metropole and the periphery that had characterized the relationship between Britain and India. East Pakistan was, in this analysis, a colony of West Pakistan: its resources were extracted for the benefit of the west, its cultural identity was suppressed in favor of the dominant culture of the metropolitan center, its political representation was manipulated to maintain the dominance of the West Pakistani ruling class, and its grievances were addressed with the same combination of contempt, condescension, and occasional violence that colonial powers have always employed against subject populations.

This analysis is not original to Khan; it is shared by most serious students of Pakistani political history. But Khan gives it a particular inflection by insisting on the class dimension of the colonial relationship. The West Pakistani ruling class that dominated Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s was not simply ethnically or linguistically different from the Bengali majority; it was also a class formation with specific economic interests. The economic policies of the Pakistani government consistently favored West Pakistan over East Pakistan: investment was concentrated in the west, industrial policy favored West Pakistani industries, and the foreign exchange earned primarily by East Pakistan's jute exports was used to develop industries in West Pakistan. The Bengali-speaking majority of Pakistan was not just culturally oppressed; it was economically exploited.

The Awami League's Six Points Program of 1966, which Khan discusses at length in his analysis of the Liberation War, was a demand for a degree of economic and political autonomy that would have addressed this structural exploitation. Its six points called for a federal parliamentary system, separate monetary systems for each wing, separate foreign exchange accounts, the power to levy taxes and collect revenue, separate para-military forces, and the right to negotiate trade and aid agreements with foreign countries. These demands, which were inspired by a sophisticated economic analysis of the structural inequalities of the Pakistani economy, represented the economic face of the Bengali nationalist movement. The military government's response, which included the arrest of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on charges of sedition, only intensified the sense of political exclusion that the Six Points was designed to address.

CHAPTER FIFTY: THE 1971 LIBERATION WAR AND THE FOUNDING OF BANGLADESH

50.1 The Three Principles: Equality, Human Dignity, Social Justice

Khan's reading of the Liberation War of 1971 is organized around what he identifies as its three fundamental principles: equality, human dignity, and social justice. These principles, which he elaborates in his book *Behat Biplab* (The Great Revolution), are not simply rhetorical slogans but substantive commitments that carry specific political implications.

Equality, in Khan's reading, means the principle of equal citizenship regardless of religious, ethnic, or class identity: the commitment to a polity in which every person has the same political

rights, the same legal protections, and the same claim to the resources of the society, irrespective of their religious community. This principle is directly opposed to the communalist logic of the Pakistani state, which had made Muslim identity the basis of citizenship and had therefore made non-Muslims into second-class citizens. It is also opposed to the class-based inequalities that structured both colonial and Pakistani social arrangements.

Human dignity, in Khan's reading, goes beyond the formal equality of legal rights to include the substantive conditions necessary for a life of self-respect and agency. Dignity is violated not only by legal discrimination but by the conditions of poverty, ignorance, and powerlessness that prevent people from exercising their formal rights effectively. The Liberation War was a war for dignity in this full sense: a war against the conditions that made the Bengali-speaking majority of Pakistan subjects rather than citizens, dependent rather than autonomous, recipients of charity rather than makers of their own destiny.

Social justice, in Khan's reading, means the specific commitment to addressing the economic inequalities and class structures that perpetuate inequality and indignity. It means land reform, workers' rights, equitable distribution of the social product, and the subordination of private economic interests to the common good. This commitment to social justice marks the Liberation War, in Khan's analysis, as not merely a nationalist movement but a social revolution: a transformation not just of the political arrangements of the state but of the economic and social structures of the society.

These three principles are important for understanding Khan's analysis of communalism, because they provide the standard by which he judges the subsequent political history of Bangladesh. Every time the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice have been compromised by communalist politics, every time the rights of minorities have been violated in the name of religious identity, every time the economic interests of elites have been protected by appeals to communal solidarity, the legacy of the Liberation War has been betrayed. And this betrayal, in Khan's analysis, is not accidental or peripheral: it is the central political fact about the history of Bangladesh since independence.

50.2 The Role of Islamism in 1971

Khan's analysis of the Liberation War includes an unflinching account of the role played by Islamist political forces, particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami and its affiliated student organization the Islami Chhatra Sangha (now Islami Chhatra Shibir), in supporting the Pakistani military's campaign of violence against the Bengali population. This account is historically documented and broadly accepted by serious historians, but it remains politically contested in contemporary Bangladesh, where Jamaat and its successor formations have sought to minimize or deny this history.

The Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan opposed the Liberation War because its political theology, derived from the thought of Maulana Mawdudi, held that the division of the Muslim community along ethnic or linguistic lines was illegitimate. For Jamaat, the Pakistani state was an Islamic state, and the Bengali Muslim community's demand for autonomy and eventually independence was a betrayal of the Islamic principle of unity. This theological position had immediate political

consequences: it aligned Jamaat with the West Pakistani military's characterization of the Bengali nationalist movement as anti-Islamic, and it provided ideological justification for the violence that the military conducted against the Bengali population under the cover of suppressing an anti-Islamic rebellion.

The auxiliary forces that Jamaat organized in support of the Pakistani military, the Razakars, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams, were directly involved in atrocities against the Bengali population: killings, rapes, lootings, and the systematic targeting of Hindu minorities and Bengali intellectuals. The killing of Bengali intellectuals in the final days of the war, organized by Al-Badr (which was staffed primarily by Jamaat's student wing), was a deliberate attempt to decapitate the intellectual and cultural leadership of the emerging Bangladeshi state. The murder of writers, professors, doctors, and journalists in the days before Bangladesh's final liberation represents one of the most deliberate and systematic atrocities of the Liberation War.

Khan's analysis of this history is precise and unsparing. He insists that what Jamaat did in 1971 was not simply a matter of political misjudgment or the application of a legitimate theological principle that turned out, in the event, to be on the wrong side of history. It was a moral crime, a deliberate choice to align with a genocidal military against a people who were asserting their right to self-determination. And the failure to hold the perpetrators of these crimes accountable, through the war crimes tribunal process that was not seriously initiated until 2010 under the Hasina government, was itself a political and moral failure that had consequences for the subsequent development of Bangladesh's political culture.

The question of accountability for 1971 is intimately connected to the question of communalism, because the Jamaat-e-Islami's attempt to rehabilitate itself after independence, and its eventual integration into Bangladeshi mainstream politics as a coalition partner of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in the 1990s and 2000s, required a sustained effort to minimize the historical memory of 1971 and to prevent the public reckoning with the crimes of that year that Khan and others have demanded. The suppression of the history of 1971 made it impossible to understand the historical roots of Islamist communalism in Bangladesh, and therefore impossible to address those roots politically.

50.3 The Founding Constitution and Its Secular Commitments

The Constitution of Bangladesh adopted in 1972 expressed the founding ideological commitments of the new state in its four fundamental principles: nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. These four principles, often referred to collectively as Mujibism (after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh), represented a specific vision of what Bangladesh should be: a democratic socialist state organized around Bengali national identity and committed to the separation of religion from the state's formal political identity.

Khan's analysis of the founding constitution is, once again, dialectical. He appreciates the constitution's commitment to secularism, which he sees as the political expression of the Liberation War's principle of equality: the principle that every citizen, regardless of religious identity, has equal rights and equal standing before the state. But he is also critical of the specific

form that secularism took in the 1972 constitution, which he sees as insufficiently attentive to the specific religious and cultural sensibilities of the Bengali Muslim majority.

The secularism of the 1972 constitution, in Khan's analysis, was modeled too closely on the European version of secularism, which understood the separation of religion and politics primarily as a restriction on the role of religious institutions in formal political life. This model was not wrong, but it was inadequate to the specific conditions of Bangladesh, where the relationship between religious identity and cultural life was far more intimate and complex than the European model acknowledged. The constitution's secular provisions were experienced by many Bangladeshis not as the protection of everyone's religious freedom but as the suppression of the Muslim majority's religious identity in favor of a secularism associated with Hindu Bengali cultural norms.

This experience created a vulnerability that Islamist politicians would exploit with great effectiveness in subsequent decades. The equation of secularism with anti-Islam, which is one of the central discursive moves of Islamist politics in Bangladesh, drew on a genuine popular perception that the secular intellectuals who shaped the 1972 constitution were more comfortable with the Bengali literary tradition (which includes a large Hindu component, most prominently represented by Tagore) than with the Islamic dimension of Bengali Muslim culture. This perception was not without foundation, though it was systematically exaggerated by Islamist propaganda.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE: THE ISLAMIZATION OF BANGLADESH AFTER 1975

51.1 The Assassination of Mujib and the Political Transformation

The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975, along with most of his family, was a pivotal moment in Bangladeshi political history. Khan's analysis of this event and its aftermath is central to his account of how the founding commitments of the Bangladesh constitution were systematically undone in the subsequent decades.

The military governments that came to power after the assassination, first under Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and then under Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990), both undertook deliberate programs of Islamization that reversed key provisions of the 1972 constitution. Ziaur Rahman added the phrase "Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim" (In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful) to the preamble of the constitution and replaced the principle of secularism with the principle of "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah." Ershad went further, amending the constitution in 1988 to make Islam the state religion of Bangladesh.

These changes were not merely symbolic. They had concrete political consequences for the relationship between the state and its religious minorities, for the treatment of secularism and religious freedom as constitutional values, and for the terms on which Islamist political organizations could participate in public life. By making Islam the ideological foundation of the

state, the military governments effectively legitimized the Islamist political agenda in ways that were very difficult to reverse even after the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991.

Khan's analysis of Islamization under the military governments emphasizes several dimensions that are often underanalyzed. First, he insists on the class character of the Islamization project. Ziaur Rahman's constitution changes and Ershad's declaration of Islam as the state religion were not primarily expressions of genuine religious conviction; they were political strategies for building coalitions with Islamist organizations and religious establishments that could provide a base of political support. The quid pro quo was explicit: Islamist organizations received political legitimacy, access to state resources, and protection from accountability for the crimes of 1971 in exchange for their political support for the military regimes.

Second, Khan analyzes the way in which the construction of a specifically Bangladeshi national identity, as distinct from the Bengali identity that was the basis of the Liberation War, served the interests of the post-1975 political establishment. Ziaur Rahman's concept of "Bangladeshi nationalism," which replaced the "Bengali nationalism" of the Mujib era, was a deliberate attempt to create an identity that incorporated the Islamic dimension of Bangladeshi culture in a way that the secular Bengali nationalism of the Awami League had not. By insisting on a "Bangladeshi" identity that was specifically Muslim as well as Bengali, Zia's nationalism was able to draw on both the linguistic nationalism of 1952 and the religious nationalism of the Pakistan movement, producing a synthesis that proved enormously effective as political mobilization.

Third, Khan traces the specific consequences of Islamization for the educational system, the cultural institutions, and the everyday life of Bangladeshi citizens. The expansion of madrasa education under the military governments, the introduction of Islamically-oriented content into state school curricula, the empowering of religious institutions as channels for state patronage: all of these changes created a new cultural landscape in which Islamist discourse and Islamist social organizations became normal features of public life rather than marginal alternatives.

51.2 The Re-emergence of Jamaat and the Politics of 1971's Memory

One of the most consequential aspects of the political transformation after 1975 was the rehabilitation of the Jamaat-e-Islami and its integration into mainstream Bangladeshi politics. Jamaat had been banned after independence, under the provisions of the 1972 constitution that prohibited communal politics, but it was rehabilitated under Ziaur Rahman's government and eventually became a significant player in the electoral politics of Bangladesh, forming coalition governments with both major parties at various points.

Khan's analysis of Jamaat's rehabilitation is one of the most sustained and historically specific engagements with the problem of political accountability in his work. He is not merely making the general point that organizations responsible for crimes should be held accountable; he is making the specific argument that Jamaat's rehabilitation required, as a condition of its possibility, the suppression of the historical memory of 1971, and that this suppression had profound consequences for the development of political culture in Bangladesh.

If Bangladeshi society had conducted a serious reckoning with the crimes of 1971 in the years immediately after independence, as many other post-conflict societies have done through processes of transitional justice, Jamaat could not have been rehabilitated as a legitimate political actor. But the political incentives facing successive Bangladeshi governments made such a reckoning politically difficult: Jamaat commanded a significant base of electoral support, it had organizational resources and international connections (particularly with Gulf Arab countries) that made it useful as a political ally, and the military governments that controlled Bangladesh for most of the period from 1975 to 1990 had no interest in prosecuting war crimes that would implicate them, through their political alliances, in the crimes of 1971.

The consequence was a profound distortion of Bangladeshi political culture: a normalized state of historical amnesia about 1971 that made it impossible to have an honest public conversation about the relationship between Islamist politics and violence. Jamaat and its allies were able to present themselves as ordinary political actors with legitimate positions on contemporary issues, rather than as an organization with a specific responsibility for the crimes of 1971 that required acknowledgment and accountability.

Khan's analysis of this situation draws explicitly on the concept of foreclosure that he derives from Lacanian psychoanalysis. Foreclosure, for Lacan, is the most radical form of denial: not repression, in which a memory is pushed out of consciousness but continues to exert influence through the return of the repressed, but the wholesale rejection of a representation from the symbolic order itself, so that it leaves no trace. What Bangladeshi political culture did with the memory of 1971 was not exactly foreclosure in the technical Lacanian sense, because the memory has never been entirely absent, but it had something of foreclosure's character: the systematic exclusion of the full truth of 1971 from the official symbolic order of the state, with the consequence that what returned was not the specific truth of what Jamaat did but a series of disavowed symptoms: the communal violence that periodically erupted, the targeting of minorities, the undercurrent of religious hostility toward secularism and modernity.

51.3 The Shahbagh Movement of 2013 and Its Implications

The Shahbagh Movement of 2013 represents one of the most important moments in the recent history of Bangladeshi politics, and Khan's engagement with it is one of the clearest expressions of his political commitments and his analytical framework. Understanding his response to Shahbagh requires understanding both what the movement was and what the political context was in which it emerged.

The Shahbagh protests began in February 2013 at Shahbagh intersection in Dhaka, initially organized by bloggers and online activists who were dissatisfied with the verdict in the trial of Abdul Quader Molla, a senior leader of Jamaat-e-Islami who had been convicted of crimes against humanity committed during the 1971 Liberation War. Molla had been sentenced to life imprisonment rather than death, and the protesters demanded the death penalty for him and for all others convicted of similar crimes. The protests rapidly grew into a mass movement, drawing hundreds of thousands of participants over several weeks and generating enormous media coverage both domestically and internationally.

Khan came out in strong support of the Shahbagh movement. His support was not uncritical: he was aware of the movement's internal tensions, its relationship to the Awami League government that had initiated the war crimes tribunal process, and the danger that it could be used as a vehicle for partisan political mobilization rather than as a genuine demand for justice. But his support was clear and unequivocal on the central demand: that the perpetrators of the crimes of 1971 should be held accountable, and that accountability required the full weight of justice rather than compromise sentences that had the effect of minimizing the gravity of what had been done.

Khan's analysis of the Shahbagh movement in its political context draws on his understanding of how historical trauma functions in political life. The energy that generated Shahbagh was not simply or even primarily a rational demand for institutional accountability; it was the expression of a long-suppressed collective grief and anger that had found no legitimate outlet in the decades of political compromise and historical amnesia that had characterized Bangladeshi politics since the rehabilitation of Jamaat. The movement's extraordinary emotional intensity was the measure of how much had been suppressed and for how long.

At the same time, Khan was acutely aware of the dangers that the movement's emotional intensity created. The framing of the war crimes issue as a conflict between pro-liberation and anti-liberation forces, which became dominant in the Shahbagh discourse, could easily slide into a simplistic division of Bangladeshi society into patriots and traitors, secularists and Islamists, the good and the bad. This division is not without historical foundation, but it is too simple to capture the complex reality of contemporary Bangladeshi politics, and its political deployment can serve to delegitimize legitimate criticism of the Awami League government and to suppress the complexity of Bangladesh's religious culture.

The Islamist backlash against Shahbagh, organized primarily by Hefazat-e-Islam and by Jamaat and its allies, framed the movement as an attack on Islam and on the Muslim majority of Bangladesh. This framing was dishonest, but it was politically effective, because it drew on the genuine anxieties of many religiously conservative Bangladeshis who found the secular and sometimes anti-religious tone of some Shahbagh bloggers deeply offensive. The targeting of specific bloggers as atheists who had blasphemed against Islam was a deliberate strategy to divide the broad coalition that Shahbagh had assembled and to redirect popular anger from the specific demand for justice for 1971 crimes to the general question of the place of religion in Bangladeshi public life.

Khan's analysis of this counter-mobilization is one of the sharpest examples of his Lacanian-inflected analysis of political ideology. The move from "these specific individuals should be held accountable for specific crimes" to "the demand for accountability is an attack on Islam" is a classic example of what Lacan would call the sliding of the signifier: the substitution of a general and emotionally charged signification for a specific and politically limited one. By translating the specific demand for war crimes accountability into the general frame of Islam versus secularism, the Islamist counter-mobilization was able to activate the deep reservoir of communal identity that underlies much of Bangladeshi political sentiment and to direct it against the movement that had been demanding justice.

51.4 Khan's Critique of Farhad Mazhar

Khan's engagement with Farhad Mazhar on the Shahbagh issue deserves extended attention, both because Mazhar is himself an important intellectual figure in Bangladeshi public life and because the dispute between them illuminates some of the most important political and theoretical divides within the Bangladeshi left.

Farhad Mazhar, a poet, thinker, and political commentator, has been associated with a distinctive position in Bangladeshi intellectual life that combines a critique of Western-style secularism with an affirmative engagement with Islamic tradition and with a politics of rural peasant life that draws on the Physiocratic tradition. Mazhar has been critical of what he sees as the urban, secularist, and elite character of the Shahbagh movement, arguing that it does not represent the concerns of the majority of Bangladeshis and that its demand for capital punishment is morally and politically misguided.

Khan's sharp criticism of Mazhar on this issue is not simply a disagreement about the appropriate sentence for war criminals. It reflects a deeper disagreement about the relationship between Islam, politics, and social justice in the Bangladeshi context. Khan has argued that Mazhar's position, whatever its ostensible political credentials, effectively aligns him with the Islamist political forces that have been the primary obstacle to accountability for 1971, and that his critique of Shahbagh serves the interests of those forces regardless of Mazhar's intentions.

More fundamentally, Khan objects to what he sees as Mazhar's romanticism about rural peasant life and Islamic tradition, which he reads as a form of political mystification that prevents clear analysis of the actual conditions of rural poverty, the actual consequences of Islamist politics for women and minorities, and the actual class interests that religious mobilization serves. The celebration of the peasant and the invocation of Islamic tradition can serve progressive political purposes, as they did in certain moments of the anti-colonial movement, but in the contemporary Bangladeshi context they can equally serve to legitimate conservative social arrangements and to prevent the social transformation that equality, human dignity, and social justice require.

The Mazhar-Khan dispute is a microcosm of a broader debate within the Bangladeshi intellectual left about how to relate to religious tradition and popular religious sentiment. Khan's position, which combines a sharp critique of communalist politics with respect for the genuine spiritual dimensions of religious life, and which insists that the test of any political movement is its relationship to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice rather than its relationship to any particular cultural tradition, is one coherent response to this debate. Mazhar's position, which combines a critique of secular modernism with an affirmative engagement with Islamic tradition and rural popular culture, is another. The debate between them reflects genuine intellectual and political tensions that do not admit of easy resolution.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO: HEFAZAT-E-ISLAM AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS POPULISM

52.1 The Rise of Hefazat

Hefazat-e-Islam is a relatively recent formation in Bangladeshi political life, emerging as a significant political actor around 2010 and reaching a peak of political visibility with its massive rally at Shapla Chattar in Dhaka on 5 May 2013. Understanding Hefazat requires understanding the specific social base from which it draws its support and the specific political moment in which it emerged.

Hefazat-e-Islam is primarily an organization of Qawmi madrasa teachers and students. The Qawmi madrasa system is the network of Islamic educational institutions that operates largely outside the state educational system and uses the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum derived from eighteenth-century Indian Islamic scholarship. The Qawmi madrasas enroll millions of students across Bangladesh, primarily from poor rural families who cannot afford or who have cultural reasons to avoid the state school system, and they produce graduates with a specialized Islamic education but limited preparation for participation in the modern economy and public sphere.

The Qawmi madrasa system has long existed in a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the Bangladeshi state: it is not formally regulated, it does not receive direct state funding (unlike the Aliya madrasa system, which is integrated into the state educational apparatus), and its graduates' qualifications are not formally recognized for purposes of government employment or higher education. This marginalization has produced a specific form of political resentment that Hefazat has been able to mobilize: the resentment of a large, internally organized community that feels excluded from the formal recognition and material benefits that the state distributes.

Hefazat's political demands, as expressed in its famous thirteen-point charter issued in 2013, illustrate the specific character of this political formation. The demands included the death penalty for blasphemy, the prohibition of free mixing of men and women in public spaces, the removal of statues from public places, and the inclusion of Islamic content in educational curricula. These demands represent a specific vision of public life organized around strict Islamic social norms, a vision that is explicitly opposed to the principles of secular democracy and that has profound implications for the rights of women and minorities.

Khan's analysis of Hefazat is characteristically multi-dimensional. He does not treat Hefazat simply as a manifestation of religious extremism that needs to be suppressed; he takes seriously the social conditions that have produced it and the genuine grievances that have given it political traction. But he is also unsparing in his analysis of what Hefazat's political program would mean in practice for the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that he takes to be the animating values of the Bangladeshi national project.

52.2 The Class Basis of Hefazat Politics

One of Khan's most important contributions to the analysis of Hefazat is his insistence on understanding it through the lens of class politics. The Qawmi madrasa system that forms Hefazat's social base enrolls students primarily from poor and lower-middle-class rural families, and it produces graduates who have few economic prospects in the mainstream economy. The economic marginalization of Qawmi madrasa graduates is not incidental to Hefazat's politics; it is one of the primary motors of its political energy.

The demand for the formal recognition of the Dawra (the highest qualification in the Qawmi madrasa system, roughly equivalent to a master's degree) was a central political demand of the Hefazat movement and its allied organizations. When the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina granted this recognition in April 2017, in what many observers interpreted as an attempt to buy Hefazat's political support, Khan offered a nuanced assessment. He acknowledged that the recognition of the Dawra was, in principle, a positive step toward the integration of the Qawmi community into the national mainstream, and that the economic and educational marginalization of Qawmi graduates was a genuine injustice that deserved to be addressed.

But he also expressed concern about the political context in which the recognition was granted and the conditions under which it was offered. The recognition of the Dawra without a corresponding reform of the Qawmi curriculum, without measures to ensure that Qawmi graduates would have the additional skills necessary to participate effectively in the modern economy and public sphere, risked simply adding a formal qualification to an existing structure of educational isolation without creating the genuine inclusion that the measure was supposed to achieve. And the political price paid for Hefazat's support, which included the government's accommodation of Hefazat's demands on various cultural and social issues, was a price paid at the expense of the principles of secularism and equal rights that the constitution was supposed to guarantee.

52.3 The Psychoanalytic Dimension: Jouissance, the Other, and Communal Violence

Khan's analysis of communal violence, including the specific forms of violence that have accompanied Hefazat's political mobilizations and the more general pattern of anti-Hindu communal violence that has recurred throughout Bangladesh's post-independence history, deploys the psychoanalytic framework of Lacanian theory with particular effectiveness.

For Lacan, the concept of *jouissance* (which might be translated as excessive enjoyment or surplus pleasure, though neither translation fully captures its meaning) is central to understanding the dynamics of group violence and communal antagonism. *Jouissance* is not simply pleasure in the ordinary sense; it is a kind of excess that goes beyond the pleasure principle, a form of satisfaction that is simultaneously painful and irresistible. The Lacanian account of ethnic and communal hatred argues that the Other (the member of another group) is conceived as possessing a special *jouissance*, an excess of enjoyment associated with the Other's cultural practices, beliefs, and social arrangements, that both fascinates and repels the subject.

In the context of communal politics, this means that the Other's religion, culture, or social practice is experienced not simply as different but as excessively enjoyable, as carrying a surplus of satisfaction that threatens the subject's own enjoyment. The Hindu minority in Bangladesh is thus not simply a community with different religious practices; in the imaginary of communal politics, it is a community that is suspected of enjoying (in the sense of *jouissance*) something that the Muslim majority is denied, whether that is social privilege, economic success, cultural recognition, or the protection of powerful external patrons (India). This fantasy of the Other's excessive enjoyment is the psychic fuel that drives communal violence: the destruction of the Other's property, the desecration of their temples, the assertion of domination over their bodies is

experienced as a reclaiming of jouissance, a reassertion of the subject's right to what the Other has unjustly appropriated.

Khan's deployment of this analysis is carefully qualified. He does not present it as an explanation that excuses communal violence or that reduces it to a matter of irrational psychology. The Lacanian analysis of jouissance operates at the level of psychic structure; it explains the emotional intensity and the specific forms of communal violence but it does not explain the conditions under which that violence erupts in specific political contexts. For that explanation, Khan insists on the material and political conditions: the manipulation of communal sentiment by political elites, the specific political conjunctures that make communal violence instrumentally useful, the institutional failures of the state that allow communal violence to go unpunished.

52.4 The Pattern of Anti-Hindu Violence

The history of anti-Hindu violence in Bangladesh after 1971 is one that Khan engages with with particular seriousness, both because of its moral gravity and because of its centrality to his analysis of the failures of Bangladeshi political culture.

The pattern of anti-Hindu violence in Bangladesh follows a recurrent structure that Khan analyzes with considerable precision. Violence tends to cluster around specific political conjunctures: elections, political transitions, moments of international tension with India. It is typically triggered by a specific incident, whether real or fabricated: a rumor about a Hindu insulting Islam, a dispute over property, an allegation that a Hindu has committed some offense. The violence takes specific forms: the destruction of Hindu temples and homes, physical attacks on Hindu individuals and families, forced conversions, and the large-scale displacement of Hindu communities from areas where they have lived for generations.

What is most significant in Khan's analysis is not the occurrence of the violence, which is a historical fact, but the systematic failure of the state to protect its Hindu minority citizens and to punish those responsible for communal violence. This systematic failure is not simply a matter of inadequate institutional capacity; it reflects the political calculations of successive Bangladeshi governments, which have found it more advantageous to accommodate the political forces that promote communal violence than to defend the constitutional rights of the Hindu minority.

The consequences of this systematic failure are both specific and general. The specific consequence is the steady demographic decline of the Hindu population of Bangladesh: from approximately 28 percent of the population at independence in 1947, the Hindu proportion of the Bangladeshi population has fallen to approximately 8 percent at present, through a combination of communal violence, forced displacement, and voluntary emigration in response to insecurity and discrimination. This demographic transformation represents a profound failure of the promise of equal citizenship that the Liberation War was supposed to establish.

The general consequence is the corruption of Bangladeshi political culture: the normalization of the idea that some citizens have less protection than others, that the state's obligation to defend the rights of citizens is contingent on their religious identity, and that political advantage can be

obtained by tolerating or encouraging communal violence against minority communities. This normalization, which Khan sees as one of the deepest failures of Bangladeshi democracy, is part of the broader pattern of the betrayal of the founding principles of the Liberation War that runs through his analysis of post-independence Bangladesh.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE: THE ROHINGYA QUESTION

53.1 Historical Context

The Rohingya crisis has been one of the defining humanitarian challenges of the early twenty-first century, and it has a particular resonance for a thinker like Salimullah Khan who was born in Cox's Bazar, the coastal district of Bangladesh that has become home to the world's largest refugee camp. Khan's analysis of the Rohingya question is situated within his broader framework of anti-colonial theory and his commitment to the principles of human dignity and equal rights, but it also reflects his deep awareness of the specific historical and political context that has produced the crisis.

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group who have lived in the Rakhine State (formerly Arakan) of Myanmar for centuries. Their historical origins are disputed: Burmese nationalists and the Myanmar government have claimed that the Rohingya are recent immigrants from Bengal who have no legitimate historical claim to Burmese territory, while the Rohingya themselves and most serious historians emphasize the long historical presence of Muslim communities in Arakan going back to at least the fifteenth century. The status of the Rohingya as a distinct ethnic and religious community with historical roots in the region is the first casualty of the politics of exclusion and denial that has characterized the Myanmar state's relationship to this community.

The Myanmar government's treatment of the Rohingya as illegal immigrants rather than citizens has a long history, but it intensified dramatically after Myanmar's transition to a nominally democratic system under international pressure beginning in 2010. The paradox that Khan and other analysts have noted is that the political liberalization of Myanmar was accompanied by an intensification of ethnic and communal violence against the Rohingya and other Muslim minorities. The liberalization of political space in Myanmar allowed the expression of Buddhist nationalist sentiment that had been suppressed under military rule, and this Buddhist nationalist mobilization found one of its primary objects in the figure of the Muslim Other.

Khan's analysis of the Buddhist nationalist movement in Myanmar draws on the same psychoanalytic framework he applies to Islamic communalism in Bangladesh. The Rohingya, in the imaginary of Burmese Buddhist nationalism, are conceived as a threatening Other whose presence violates the purity of the Buddhist national community: they are too many, too fertile, too economically successful, too connected to the dangerous Islamic world beyond Burma's borders. This fantasy of threatening excess is the psychic structure that underlies the campaign of ethnic cleansing that was conducted against the Rohingya most intensively in 2017, when the military responded to attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army with a campaign of mass

murder, rape, and forced displacement that the United Nations has described as bearing the hallmarks of genocide.

53.2 Bangladesh and the Rohingya Refugees

Bangladesh's response to the Rohingya refugee crisis has been shaped by a complex set of considerations that Khan analyzes with characteristic attention to the tensions between competing values and interests. Bangladesh has provided refuge to approximately one million Rohingya refugees, primarily concentrated in the camps near Cox's Bazar, and this represents a genuine expression of solidarity with a persecuted Muslim minority. But Bangladesh's accommodation of the refugees has also been accompanied by measures that restrict their freedom of movement, limit their access to education and employment, and prevent their integration into Bangladeshi society, measures that reflect the government's concern about the political and economic costs of a permanent refugee population.

Khan's analysis situates the Rohingya crisis within the broader framework of his thinking about communalism, displacement, and the politics of identity. The Rohingya represent, in his analysis, a paradigmatic case of what happens when communalist politics are taken to their logical conclusion: the exclusion from the political community of anyone who does not fit the dominant community's definition of belonging. The fact that this exclusion is being carried out by a Buddhist-majority state against a Muslim minority does not make it any less a manifestation of communalism; it shows that communalism is not a specifically Islamic pathology but a general pattern of political behavior that can be found in any society where political power is organized around exclusive community identity.

The Rohingya crisis also raises important questions about the international system's capacity to protect minorities and to hold states accountable for ethnic cleansing and genocide. Khan's analysis of the international response to the crisis draws on his broader critique of Western interventionism and the hypocrisies of international human rights law. The same international community that is quick to condemn Bangladesh for perceived failures of democratic governance has been notably slow and ineffective in addressing the systematic campaign of persecution that has been conducted against the Rohingya by the Myanmar government and military. This asymmetry is not incidental; it reflects the specific interests and power relations that shape international human rights politics.

53.3 The Rohingya and Regional Geopolitics

The Rohingya crisis also has important implications for the regional geopolitics of South and Southeast Asia, and Khan's analysis of these implications is connected to his broader thinking about India-Bangladesh relations and the dynamics of regional power.

The relationship between the Rohingya crisis and the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar triangle is complex. India has historically maintained close relations with Myanmar's military and has been reluctant to criticize the military's treatment of the Rohingya, partly because of its own concerns about Muslim communities in northeast India and partly because of its strategic interest in maintaining access to Myanmar's port and pipeline infrastructure. This Indian reticence has been

a source of frustration for Bangladesh, which bears the primary burden of the refugee crisis while receiving limited support from the regional power that has the most influence over the Myanmar government's behavior.

Khan uses the Rohingya crisis as one illustration of his broader argument about the limitations of a regional order organized around national sovereignty and state interests rather than around the principles of human rights and democratic solidarity. His analysis of the crisis connects to his critique of Indian proto-colonialism: the same India that expects Bangladesh to maintain cordial relations and to accommodate Indian economic and strategic interests is unable or unwilling to use its influence with Myanmar to protect a Muslim minority that shares cultural and linguistic ties with the people of Bangladesh's own southeastern districts.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR: KHAN'S ANALYSIS OF INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

54.1 The Anti-Colonial Framework

One of the most distinctive and, from the perspective of some critics, most controversial aspects of Khan's political analysis is his sustained critique of Indian policy toward Bangladesh, which he frames in the language of anti-colonialism. Khan's argument, which he has expressed most clearly in a series of interventions following the July 2024 uprising, is that India's relationship with Bangladesh has functioned as a form of proto-colonialism: a relationship of dominance and dependency that, while not involving the formal political subordination of colonialism, reproduces many of colonialism's structural features.

The core of Khan's argument about India-Bangladesh relations is organized around several specific grievances that he regards as manifestations of Indian proto-colonialism. The first is the water issue: India's unilateral management of the shared river systems of the two countries, including the refusal to finalize a comprehensive water-sharing agreement for the Teesta River, and the planning of a river-linking project that would divert massive amounts of water from rivers flowing into Bangladesh, represents, in Khan's analysis, a structural exploitation of Bangladesh's downstream position that has profound consequences for agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and the long-term environmental viability of the Bangladeshi economy.

The second grievance is trade and economic relations. Bangladesh and India have a highly asymmetric trade relationship: India exports far more to Bangladesh than it imports, and the structures of the bilateral trade relationship are organized primarily around Indian economic interests. The non-tariff barriers that India maintains against Bangladeshi goods, the restrictions on Bangladeshi labor migration to India, and the economic policies that maintain Bangladesh in a position of dependence on Indian goods and services are, for Khan, expressions of a neo-colonial economic relationship that serves Indian interests at the expense of Bangladeshi development.

The third grievance, which became particularly prominent in Khan's interventions following the July 2024 uprising, is India's political support for the Hasina government even as that government engaged in systematic repression and electoral manipulation. Khan's argument is that India's prioritization of a stable, pliable government in Dhaka over the democratic rights of the Bangladeshi people represents a form of political colonialism: the subordination of Bangladesh's internal political development to the strategic interests of the regional hegemon.

54.2 The Minority Protection Issue

The question of the protection of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh is one on which Khan's analysis intersects in complex ways with his critique of Indian proto-colonialism, and his treatment of this issue illustrates the dialectical character of his thought.

On one hand, Khan is unequivocal in his condemnation of communal violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, and he regards the state's systematic failure to protect its Hindu citizens as one of the deepest failures of Bangladeshi democracy. His commitment to the principle of equal citizenship requires him to take seriously the specific vulnerabilities of the Hindu minority community and to support measures that would provide genuine protection for minority rights.

On the other hand, Khan is deeply suspicious of the specific ways in which the Hindu minority protection issue has been deployed in Indian political discourse, particularly in the period following the July 2024 uprising. His argument, expressed forcefully in an interview in April 2025, is that Indian political elites have used exaggerated and sometimes fabricated accounts of anti-Hindu violence in Bangladesh as a pretext for asserting a right of intervention in Bangladeshi internal affairs and for delegitimizing the political changes that followed the uprising. The instrumentalization of minority protection as a tool of geopolitical pressure is, for Khan, a form of political cynicism that serves Indian strategic interests while doing nothing to actually protect the Hindu minority.

The distinction Khan draws here is an important one. There is a genuine problem of anti-Hindu communal violence in Bangladesh, and addressing it is a responsibility of the Bangladeshi state and society. But the specific form in which this problem has been raised in Indian political discourse, which frequently involves dramatic exaggerations, false claims, and the systematic conflation of the crimes of specific individuals with the policies of the Bangladeshi state, is not a contribution to solving the problem. It is, rather, a geopolitical strategy that uses the real suffering of the Hindu minority to serve Indian interests. Khan's analysis insists on maintaining the distinction between the genuine problem (communal violence against minorities) and the spurious solution (Indian intervention justified by concern for minority protection).

54.3 The July 2024 Uprising and India

The July 2024 uprising, which resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 5 August 2024, created a profound crisis in India-Bangladesh relations, and Khan's analysis of this crisis is one of his most important contributions to the public debate about Bangladesh's political future.

Hasina's flight to India, where she was given refuge after her resignation, was experienced by many Bangladeshis as evidence of the depth of the India-Hasina connection and of India's complicity in the repressive governance that had made the uprising necessary. The Indian government's response to the uprising, which combined official acceptance of the new interim government with extensive media coverage emphasizing attacks on Hindu minorities and questioning the legitimacy of the post-Hasina political transition, was widely perceived in Bangladesh as an attempt to delegitimize the uprising and to prepare the ground for eventual Hasina restoration.

Khan's interventions on this issue, particularly his September 2024 piece in *Outlook India* and his December 2024 interview, represent his most explicit and detailed engagement with the India-Bangladesh relationship. His argument, as noted above, is that India's relationship with Bangladesh needs to be transformed from a relationship of dependency and dominance into a relationship of genuine equality and mutual respect. This transformation requires India to accept that Bangladesh has the right to determine its own political future without Indian veto, and that the democratic aspirations of the Bangladeshi people take precedence over the convenience of any specific political arrangement that serves Indian strategic interests.

Khan connects this argument to the broader anti-colonial framework by pointing out that the structural features of the India-Bangladesh relationship, the water issue, the trade asymmetry, the political pressure, reproduce the same logic of dependent development and external political control that characterized the relationship between colonial metropolises and their peripheral territories. The fact that India itself was once a colonized nation and that the Indian nationalist movement was built on the principles of anti-colonialism makes the neo-colonial character of India's regional policy particularly hypocritical, and Khan does not hesitate to say so.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELIGION, SECULARISM, AND DEMOCRACY

55.1 Against Secular Fundamentalism

Khan's analysis of religion in Bangladeshi politics is not simply a defense of secularism against religious politics. It is a more subtle and dialectically sophisticated engagement that recognizes both the legitimate role of religious values in public life and the specific dangers of religious politics when it takes communalist forms.

One of Khan's most consistent intellectual targets is what he calls secular fundamentalism: the mirror image of religious fundamentalism that responds to the dangers of political religion by advocating the complete exclusion of religious values and religious communities from political life. Secular fundamentalism, in Khan's analysis, is both theoretically confused and politically counterproductive.

It is theoretically confused because it fails to recognize that secularism is itself a historical formation with specific cultural roots, not a universal neutral position that transcends all

particular cultural commitments. The European tradition of secularism, with its specific history of wars of religion, the Enlightenment critique of ecclesiastical authority, and the philosophical tradition of natural rights theory, cannot simply be exported to a Muslim-majority postcolonial society without significant transformation. The assumption that secularism is the natural endpoint of political development, and that the presence of religious values in political life represents a form of backwardness or immaturity, is itself a form of cultural imperialism that reproduces the colonial logic of civilizational hierarchy.

Secular fundamentalism is also politically counterproductive in the Bangladeshi context because it plays into the hands of the Islamist political formations that it is supposed to oppose. When secular intellectuals and politicians treat religious sentiment as inherently backward or dangerous, when they fail to distinguish between the genuine spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islamic tradition and the specific political formations that exploit that tradition for communalist purposes, they alienate the majority of the population who are genuinely religious and who experience secularist contempt for their religious identity as an attack on something precious to them. This alienation creates the political space that Islamist formations exploit.

55.2 For Democratic Secularism

Against both religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism, Khan advocates for what he calls democratic secularism: a form of secularism that is organized around the principles of equal rights, democratic governance, and human dignity rather than around the cultural project of eliminating religion from public life.

Democratic secularism, in Khan's formulation, does not require individuals to suppress or privatize their religious identities. It requires the state to maintain equal respect for all religious communities, to protect the rights of religious minorities against communal violence and discrimination, and to refuse to use the state's power to impose any particular religious tradition's norms on citizens who do not share those norms. Within these constraints, individuals and communities are free to express their religious values in their public as well as their private lives, to argue for policies that are consistent with their religious commitments, and to organize politically around their religious identities as long as they do so in ways that respect the equal rights of others.

This is a formulation that has significant precedents in democratic theory. John Rawls's concept of public reason, which holds that in a democratic society citizens should argue for political positions using premises that could in principle be accepted by citizens of different religious and philosophical commitments, represents one version of this position. Jürgen Habermas's analysis of the "post-secular society," which argues that in contemporary societies the sharp distinction between religious and secular is breaking down and that democratic politics must find ways to accommodate both religious and secular forms of public reason, represents another. Khan's formulation draws on these traditions but inflects them through the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political life.

What makes Khan's version distinctive is his insistence that democratic secularism must be substantively committed to equality, human dignity, and social justice, not merely formally

committed to procedural neutrality between religious and secular. A secularism that maintains formal religious neutrality while tolerating the extreme economic inequalities and class structures that underlie communalist politics is, in Khan's analysis, inadequate. It provides no answer to the question of why religiously exploited people should prefer a secular democratic order that leaves their exploitation intact to a religious political movement that at least promises solidarity and community.

This insistence on the substantive social justice dimension of democratic secularism is one of the places where Khan's Marxist commitments most clearly shape his political analysis. The solution to communalism is not simply the correct constitutional arrangement or the right institutional design; it requires the transformation of the material conditions, the economic structures and class arrangements, that make communalism politically effective. As long as large numbers of Bangladeshis experience themselves as economically marginal, politically powerless, and culturally disrespected, the promise of community solidarity and divine justice that religious politics offers will continue to resonate more powerfully than the abstract principles of secular democratic theory.

55.3 Islam, the Bengali Muslim Tradition, and Political Possibility

One of the most interesting and, for many readers, surprising aspects of Khan's analysis of religion and politics is his affirmative engagement with the specific tradition of Islam as it has been practiced in Bengal. This engagement is surprising because Khan is often characterized, especially by his critics on the religious right, as an anti-Islamic secularist who wants to eliminate religious values from Bangladeshi public life. In fact, his position is considerably more nuanced.

Khan distinguishes between what he calls the living tradition of Islamic practice in Bengal, with its specific character shaped by centuries of interaction with Bengali cultural life, Sufi spirituality, and the syncretic tendencies of the Baul-Fakir tradition, and the specific political formations that claim to represent Islamic interests in contemporary Bangladesh. The former he regards with genuine respect; the latter he analyzes critically.

The Islamic tradition as it has developed in Bengal, in Khan's analysis, has historically expressed values that are genuinely compatible with democratic humanism: values of compassion, justice, community solidarity, and resistance to worldly tyranny. The tradition of Sufi spirituality that shaped Bengal's distinctive form of Islamic practice emphasized the inner dimensions of religious life over the outer forms, the direct relationship between the individual soul and the divine over the mediating role of clerical authority, and the universality of the human condition over the exclusivity of any particular religious community. This tradition produced figures like Lalon Shah, whose refusal of communal identity and whose insistence on the irreducible humanity of every person represent, in Khan's reading, the highest expression of the spiritual possibility of the Bengali Islamic tradition.

The problem, in Khan's analysis, is not Islam as such but the specific political formations that have claimed to represent Islamic interests in ways that betray the tradition's humanistic potentialities. Jamaat-e-Islami's theology, derived from Mawdudi's systematic and ideological

interpretation of Islam, represents a fundamental break with the syncretic and Sufi-inflected Islamic tradition of Bengal in favor of a Middle Eastern model of political Islam that is alien to the specific history of Islamic practice in this region. Hefazat-e-Islam's politics, while rooted in a more specifically Bengali institutional formation (the Qawmi madrasa system), has also moved in directions that privilege social control and communal exclusivity over the spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islamic tradition.

Khan's affirmative engagement with Bengali Islamic tradition is not simply a strategic move designed to make his secularist politics more palatable to a religious audience. It reflects a genuine conviction that the resources for a progressive, democratic, and humanistic Bengali Muslim identity are available within the Islamic tradition itself, and that the task of progressive intellectuals is to recover and amplify those resources rather than to dismiss the tradition as irredeemably conservative.

55.4 Talal Asad and the Critique of Secular Liberalism

Khan's analysis of the religion-secularism relationship is informed by his engagement with the work of Talal Asad, the anthropologist of Islam whose foundational critique of the secular liberal framework has been one of the most important contributions to postcolonial theory in recent decades. Asad's argument, developed in *Genealogies of Religion and Formations of the Secular*, is that the concept of "religion" as a distinct sphere of human life, separable from politics, economy, and culture, is itself a historically specific Western construction that was applied to non-Western societies through a colonial process that systematically misrepresented the character of those societies' spiritual and political life.

Khan draws on Asad's critique to argue that the standard framework of secular liberalism, which treats religion as a private matter that individuals may or may not choose to believe in while their public life is governed by secular rational principles, is inadequate to the specific conditions of a Muslim-majority postcolonial society like Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, Islam is not simply a matter of private belief and personal practice; it is a constitutive dimension of the cultural and communal life of the majority of the population, and any political framework that ignores or marginalizes this dimension is both intellectually inadequate and politically unworkable.

But Khan is also careful to distinguish his appropriation of Asad's critique from the uses to which it has been put by Islamist political thinkers who have used similar arguments to justify the imposition of Islamic norms on all citizens regardless of their own religious commitments. Asad's critique of secular liberalism is a critique of a specific historical formation, not a defense of any particular alternative. It shows that secular liberalism is not a universal neutral framework but a historically specific one; it does not show that any particular form of religious politics is preferable to it. The question of what political framework is appropriate for Bangladesh cannot be answered by pointing to the limitations of secular liberalism; it requires a positive account of the principles that should govern political life, and Khan's account, organized around equality, human dignity, and social justice, is his contribution to that discussion.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

56.1 The Uprising as Political Event

The July 2024 uprising that resulted in the resignation of Sheikh Hasina on 5 August 2024 is, by any measure, one of the most significant events in the post-independence history of Bangladesh. Khan's analysis of the uprising, expressed in a series of interventions that he began making from September 2024 onward, is one of the most interesting and demanding attempts to understand what the uprising meant and what it portends for the future of Bangladesh.

Khan's first move in analyzing the uprising is to situate it in historical time, and for this purpose he deploys a reference that will by now be familiar to readers of this textbook: the framework developed by the French philosopher Alain Badiou. Badiou's concept of the "event" describes a rupture in the ordinary course of history: a moment when the existing order of things, the existing distribution of power and the existing terms of political possibility, is suddenly and violently interrupted by something that cannot be accommodated within the existing symbolic order. The event is not simply a large-scale historical occurrence; it is a moment of genuine political possibility, when what was previously impossible becomes, however briefly, real.

For Khan, the July 2024 uprising has the character of a Badiouian event: it is a moment when the young people of Bangladesh, students and other young people who had been growing up under fifteen years of Hasina's increasingly authoritarian rule, broke through the wall of fear and political paralysis that had prevented effective resistance to the regime. The uprising's most remarkable feature, in Khan's analysis, is not its immediate success (the fall of the Hasina government) but the quality of political consciousness that it expressed: the demand not just for a change of government but for a transformation of the political order, for accountability, for dignity, for the establishment of a genuinely democratic polity.

Khan frames the uprising as a return to the principles of the Liberation War: a reassertion, by a new generation, of the foundational commitments to equality, human dignity, and social justice that the Liberation War was supposed to establish and that subsequent political history had so comprehensively betrayed. The uprising's spontaneous, student-led character, its rejection of the established political parties (which had all failed to provide effective opposition to the Hasina regime), its use of social media to organize and communicate, and its extraordinary capacity to withstand violent suppression before finally achieving its goal: all of these features mark it, for Khan, as a genuinely popular democratic movement rather than a movement organized by and for particular political or class interests.

56.2 The Complex Character of the Anti-Hasina Coalition

Khan's analysis of the July uprising is not, however, simply celebratory. He is acutely aware of the complex and in some ways contradictory character of the coalition that brought down the Hasina government, and he insists on the importance of maintaining the distinctions that the heat of the moment tends to obscure.

The anti-Hasina coalition included, alongside the student activists who initiated the movement and the broad democratic public that joined them, organized Islamist formations including the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami (Islami Chhatra Shibir) and other Islamist organizations that had their own reasons to want the Hasina government removed. These formations participated in the uprising, contributed to its success, and gained significant political standing in the post-uprising political environment. Their presence in the coalition creates, for Khan, a fundamental tension in the post-uprising political situation: the uprising expressed the demand for democratic equality and human dignity, but some of its participants are committed to a political program that is fundamentally opposed to democratic equality, particularly with respect to women and religious minorities.

Khan's analysis of this tension draws on his broader framework for understanding the relationship between political Islam and democratic politics. The fact that Islamist formations participated in a democratic uprising against an authoritarian government does not mean that they have become committed to democratic values; it means that they saw the uprising as an opportunity to advance their own political agenda. The lesson that Khan draws from this observation is not that the uprising was wrong or that its Islamist participants should have been excluded, but that the democratic forces that emerged from the uprising need to be clear about what they are fighting for and to maintain that clarity in the face of the pressure from their Islamist allies to subordinate democratic commitments to the demands of anti-Hasina unity.

56.3 Communal Violence After August 2024

The outbreak of communal violence against Hindu minorities in the immediate aftermath of the Hasina government's fall represents, for Khan, one of the most troubling aspects of the post-uprising political situation. Reports of attacks on Hindu temples, homes, and individuals in the days following 5 August 2024, associated with the collapse of the police and security apparatus that occurred when the Hasina government fell, have been extensively documented by human rights organizations and confirmed by the interim government itself.

Khan's analysis of this violence situates it within the broader pattern of anti-Hindu communal violence that has recurred throughout Bangladesh's post-independence history, and he is unequivocal in his condemnation of it. The violence is morally wrong because it violates the rights of fellow citizens; it is politically destructive because it undermines the principles of equality and equal citizenship that the uprising was supposed to reassert; and it is strategically damaging because it provides India with the pretext for political pressure and interventionist claims that serve Indian rather than Bangladeshi interests.

But Khan is careful to distinguish between the violence itself and the way in which it has been represented and deployed in Indian and international media. The scale of the violence, while serious, has been systematically exaggerated in some Indian media coverage, and claims about the complicity of the interim government or the student movement in the violence are, in Khan's analysis, either unfounded or wilfully misleading. The interim government has condemned the attacks, and the primary cause of the violence in the immediate aftermath of 5 August was the collapse of law enforcement that occurs in any rapid governmental transition, not a policy of anti-Hindu discrimination.

More fundamentally, Khan insists that the violence against Hindu minorities, however serious, cannot be used to delegitimize the democratic uprising against the Hasina government or to justify the restoration of Hasina's authoritarian rule. The right response to communal violence is accountability for those who commit it and genuine structural reform of the political and institutional conditions that enable it; it is not the restoration of an authoritarian government whose own record included massive human rights violations, electoral manipulation, and systematic oppression.

56.4 The Interim Government and the Question of Democratic Transition

Khan's analysis of Muhammad Yunus's interim government, which he has continued to offer through his public interventions in 2024 and 2025, reflects the combination of strategic support and critical watchfulness that characterizes his engagement with all political formations.

He recognizes that the Yunus government faces genuine challenges: the transition from an authoritarian system to a democratic one is complex and difficult under the best circumstances, and the Bangladeshi transition is occurring in a context of economic strain, regional pressure, and institutional weaknesses accumulated over fifteen years of authoritarian rule. He appreciates the government's stated commitments to institutional reform and to the preparation of free and fair elections, and he recognizes that the presence of student activists like Nahid Islam and Asif Mahmud in the interim government represents a genuine, if limited, inclusion of the uprising's energy in the governing process.

But Khan's Gramscian instincts lead him to maintain a critical distance from any governing formation, and the analysis he expressed in his Outlook India interview with the Gramscian formulation of "optimism of the will, pessimism of the intellect" reflects his characteristic balance between hope and analytical clarity. The optimism of the will is the commitment to working for the best possible outcome, to giving the democratic process the benefit of the doubt, to not allowing pessimism to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The pessimism of the intellect is the refusal to be taken in by official rhetoric, to maintain vigilance against the ways in which the form of democratic transition can be used to preserve the substance of elite domination.

The specific concerns Khan has expressed about the interim government's management of the transition include the pace and scope of institutional reform, the handling of communal violence, the treatment of Awami League supporters and members (which has included some cases of extrajudicial violence that the government has been slow to address), and the question of when and how elections will be held. He is also watchful about the relationship between the interim government and the Islamist formations that participated in the uprising, concerned that the political debt owed to those formations might be paid at the expense of the secular democratic principles that the uprising was supposed to advance.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN: JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI, POLITICAL THEOLOGY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

57.1 Mawdudi and the Origins of Jamaat's Political Theology

Understanding Jamaat-e-Islami requires understanding the political theology developed by its founder, Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), because Jamaat's political positions in Bangladesh, both its role in 1971 and its subsequent political trajectory, are rooted in this theology in ways that are not always made explicit in political commentary.

Mawdudi's project was the development of an Islam as a complete system of life, a term he used to describe his vision of Islam as encompassing not just personal religious practice but an entire social, economic, political, and legal order. In Mawdudi's framework, the primary distinction is between the sovereignty of God (in Arabic, *hakimiyya*), which he treats as the fundamental principle of Islamic political theory, and the sovereignty of man, which he identifies with both Western democracy and communist totalitarianism as the two forms of false sovereignty that Muslims must reject.

For Mawdudi, the nation-state organized around ethnic or linguistic identity is a form of idolatry, because it substitutes the false deity of nationality for the true sovereignty of God. This theological argument was directly applied to the situation of East Pakistan in 1971: the Bengali nationalist movement was, from Mawdudi's perspective, an attempt to substitute the false deity of Bengali ethnic identity for the proper principle of Islamic unity. The violence of the Pakistani military, however regrettable in its methods, was from this perspective directed against a genuine theological error.

Khan's analysis of Mawdudi's political theology is detailed and sophisticated. He recognizes that Mawdudi was a serious and systematic thinker who addressed genuinely important questions about the relationship between religious values and political life. But he also identifies the fundamental errors in Mawdudi's framework: the reduction of the complex tradition of Islamic political thought to a single principle of divine sovereignty, the identification of that principle with a specific form of political organization that bears no necessary relationship to the Quranic text or the prophetic tradition, and the use of this theological argument to justify violence against people who are asserting their right to cultural self-determination.

More fundamentally, Khan identifies Mawdudi's political theology as a form of ideological totalitarianism: the claim to have found, in a specific theological principle, the answer to all political questions. This totalism is, for Khan, precisely the kind of political ideology that Lacanian analysis identifies as the fantasy of a complete and self-sufficient identity, a wholeness that denies the constitutive incompleteness and division of both individual subjects and social formations. The violence of Mawdudian political theology, including the violence that Jamaat's auxiliaries committed in 1971, is the violence that is always ready to erupt when a totalistic ideology encounters the inevitable gap between its claims to wholeness and the irreducibly complex reality of human political life.

57.2 Jamaat After 1971

The history of Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh after 1971 is a history of political adaptation and institutional persistence that Khan analyzes as a case study in the corruption of political accountability under conditions of electoral democracy.

Jamaat's rehabilitation under Ziaur Rahman's government in the late 1970s was accompanied by a campaign to rehabilitate its public image. The party accepted the fact of Bangladeshi independence, which its political theology had previously required it to oppose, and reframed its political program in terms of constitutional democracy. Its members and leaders who had been associated with the auxiliary forces in 1971 were gradually integrated into public life without the accountability that their actions demanded. The political pragmatism that allowed this integration, which was shared by both the BNP and eventually by the Awami League, was justified by the argument that Bangladesh needed to move forward rather than being endlessly consumed by the politics of 1971.

Khan's objection to this argument is both principled and analytical. At the principled level, he insists that accountability for grave crimes, including crimes against humanity, is not optional: it is a fundamental requirement of a just political order, both because the victims of those crimes are owed justice and because the failure to provide that justice sends a message about the value of human life and the enforceability of moral norms that has consequences for the entire fabric of social life.

At the analytical level, Khan argues that the failure of accountability for 1971 produced specific political consequences that shaped the subsequent development of Bangladeshi politics in destructive ways. The normalization of Jamaat as a legitimate political actor, combined with the suppression of the full historical record of what Jamaat did in 1971, created a political environment in which the fundamental questions about the relationship between Islam, democracy, and violence that the events of 1971 raised could never be honestly discussed. The distortion of political discourse that resulted from this suppression made it impossible for Bangladeshi society to develop a clear-eyed understanding of the specific ideological formations that pose the greatest threat to democratic governance.

57.3 The War Crimes Tribunal and Its Aftermath

The International Crimes Tribunal established under the Hasina government in 2010 and the subsequent trials and convictions of Jamaat leaders for crimes committed in 1971 were, in Khan's analysis, a genuinely significant step toward accountability, however imperfect in their implementation. He supported the tribunal process while maintaining critical distance from its conduct: acknowledging its importance as a step toward justice while expressing concerns about specific procedural issues and about the way in which the Hasina government used the tribunal as a political instrument as much as a judicial one.

The execution of Abdul Quader Molla in December 2013, following the Shahbagh movement's demand for the death penalty, was a moment of particular intensity and complexity. Khan supported the demand for accountability and acknowledged that the crimes Molla had committed were of the gravest order. But he was also aware of the specific political uses to which the tribunal process had been put, and he insisted on maintaining the distinction between the

legitimate demand for justice and the political instrumentalization of that demand by the Awami League.

In the post-2024 political environment, the question of what happens to the tribunal process under the interim government has become one of the most contested issues in Bangladeshi politics. The interim government's release of some individuals convicted by the tribunal, its lifting of the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, and its broader approach to the legacy of 1971 have generated intense debate in which Khan has been an active participant. His position insists on the distinction between accountability for specific crimes, which he regards as non-negotiable, and the use of the 1971 memory as a political tool to suppress political opposition and maintain one-party dominance, which he regards as a corruption of the justice process.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT: IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

58.1 Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition

Khan's analysis of identity politics in Bangladesh is informed by his engagement with the philosophical tradition of the politics of recognition, particularly as it has been developed by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. Taylor's essay "The Politics of Recognition," published in 1994, argues that modern identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence: by whether others recognize and affirm our identity or deny and misrecognize it. This argument has particular relevance in postcolonial contexts where the colonial experience systematically denied or degraded the identity of colonized peoples.

Taylor distinguishes between two forms of the politics of recognition. The first is the politics of equal dignity: the demand, rooted in the liberal tradition, that every person be treated as having equal worth and equal rights, regardless of their particular cultural identity. The second is the politics of difference: the demand, rooted in the communitarian tradition, that the specific identities and cultural practices of particular groups be recognized and affirmed, rather than simply subsumed under a formal equality that ignores cultural difference.

Khan's engagement with Taylor is critical as well as appropriative. He finds Taylor's framework useful for understanding certain dimensions of the identity politics that characterize Bangladeshi public life, particularly the way in which the demand for recognition of Bengali Muslim cultural identity has driven the political conflicts around language, education, and cultural policy that we examined in Part Six. But he also finds Taylor's framework limited in ways that his Lacanian-Marxist synthesis is designed to address.

The limitation, for Khan, is that Taylor's politics of recognition, while important, remains at the level of cultural and psychological analysis without adequately engaging with the material and structural dimensions of identity formation. The recognition that is demanded by Bengali Muslim nationalism, or by Bangladeshi Hindu minority communities, or by the Qawmi madrasa community, is not simply a cultural demand; it is simultaneously a political demand for equal

participation in governance and a material demand for equal access to economic resources and opportunities. A politics of recognition that addresses only the cultural dimensions of these demands while leaving the material inequalities in place is, in Khan's analysis, inadequate to the reality of the situation.

58.2 Hegel, Recognition, and the Master-Slave Dialectic

Khan's deeper philosophical engagement with the question of recognition goes back through Taylor to the Hegelian tradition that Taylor draws on, and particularly to the famous analysis of the master-slave relationship in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This analysis, which has been enormously influential in twentieth-century thought from Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel to Frantz Fanon's application of the master-slave dialectic to the colonial relationship, is one of the foundational texts for Khan's analysis of colonialism and its psychological consequences.

Hegel's account of the master-slave relationship begins from the analysis of two consciousnesses in conflict, each of which needs recognition from the other in order to become fully self-conscious. The struggle for recognition that results from this need leads to a situation in which one consciousness subdues the other and establishes a relationship of domination: the master imposes his will on the slave, forces the slave to recognize his mastery, and reduces the slave to an instrument of the master's purposes. But this situation is, Hegel shows, profoundly unstable: the master cannot get the genuine recognition he needs from a consciousness he has subjugated, because subjugated recognition is worthless. True recognition requires the recognition of an equal.

Fanon's application of this analysis to the colonial relationship, which Khan takes as one of his primary theoretical resources, shows how the colonial master-slave dynamic produces a specific form of psychological damage in both the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized subject is denied recognition as a full human being; their cultural identity is either negated or assigned a subordinate, inferior status in the colonial hierarchy of civilizations. This denial of recognition produces the specific psychology of the colonial subject that Fanon analyzes in *Black Skin, White Masks*: the split consciousness, the internalized colonialism, the desperate desire for the colonizer's validation that Khan sees reproduced in the colonial cringe of educated Bangladeshis who prefer English over Bengali.

But Fanon's analysis also shows the way in which the colonial relationship generates the energy for its own overcoming. The violence of colonialism does not simply damage its victims; it also produces, dialectically, a new political consciousness that emerges through the struggle against colonial subjugation. The Bangladeshi Liberation War is, in Khan's reading, precisely this kind of dialectical emergence: the conversion of the experience of colonial subjugation into the political energy of national liberation, the transformation of the damaged colonial subject into the new political subject of the independent nation.

58.3 Identity, Difference, and the Democratic Challenge

The challenge for post-independence Bangladesh, as Khan analyzes it, is to negotiate the complex plurality of identities that constitute the Bangladeshi population in ways that are

consistent with the founding principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice. This is not a simple challenge, because the different communities and groups that make up Bangladeshi society have different identities, different histories of inclusion and exclusion, and different claims on the resources and recognition of the state.

The Bengali Muslim majority is the dominant community of Bangladesh, and its identity, which combines Bengali linguistic and cultural nationalism with the Islamic dimension of Bengali Muslim history, shapes the terms on which all other communities must position themselves. The Hindu minority is the largest religious minority, with deep historical roots in the Bengal region but a precarious position in contemporary Bangladesh that is shaped by the history of partition, communal violence, and systematic legal and social discrimination. The indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, and other communities, have been subjected to a particularly intense form of identity politics in which their right to self-determination and their cultural identity have been systematically denied by the Bangladeshi state in ways that have generated armed conflict, forced displacement, and ongoing human rights violations. The Urdu-speaking Bihari community, stranded in Bangladesh after 1971 because of their perceived support for Pakistan, has for decades been denied citizenship and basic rights.

Khan's approach to these multiple and complex identity claims is organized around the principle that the democratic state has a fundamental obligation to protect the equal rights of all its citizens, regardless of their religious, linguistic, ethnic, or class identity, and that this obligation cannot be overridden by appeals to the majority's cultural preferences or by the political convenience of governing elites. This principle is straightforward to state but enormously difficult to implement in a society where the legacy of colonialism, partition, and communalist politics has created deep structural inequalities and mutual suspicions.

The specific challenge of the CHT is one that Khan engages with in ways that illustrate the tension between his Bengali nationalist commitments and his anti-colonial universalism. The Bengali-speaking majority's relationship to the indigenous peoples of the CHT has the character, in his analysis, of a domestic colonialism: a relationship in which the dominant majority treats the territory and resources of the minority as available for its own use and dismisses the minority's cultural and political claims as obstacles to national development. This analysis places him, on this issue, in solidarity with indigenous rights advocates who may not share all of his broader political commitments, and it illustrates his willingness to follow the logic of his anti-colonial principles even when they point toward conclusions that challenge the dominant Bengali nationalist consensus.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES (2024-2026)

59.1 The Post-Uprising Political Landscape

As of 2026, Bangladesh remains in a period of political transition that is extraordinary in its complexity and fraught with dangers and possibilities that are still being worked out. Khan's

analysis of this transition, which he has continued to offer in a series of public interventions, talks, and written pieces, represents some of his most engaged and urgent recent work.

The interim government of Muhammad Yunus has continued to pursue its agenda of institutional reform while managing the multiple pressures on the transition. Elections, which have been promised for the near future, represent both an opportunity and a risk: an opportunity for the genuine democratic renewal that the uprising demanded, and a risk that the electoral process will be captured by political forces whose commitment to democratic values is limited or instrumental.

The political environment in which elections will be held is shaped by several powerful forces that Khan analyzes with particular attention. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, weakened but not destroyed by fifteen years of exclusion from power, is seeking to reassert its position as the primary opposition to the Awami League. Jamaat-e-Islami, rehabilitated and emboldened by the post-uprising political opening, is positioning itself to gain from the favorable political climate that its participation in the uprising has created. New political formations associated with the student movement, including the National Citizens Party founded by former student activist Nahid Islam, are attempting to translate the uprising's energy into an organized political force.

Khan's analysis of this configuration is skeptical about the likelihood that elections alone will produce the genuine democratic transformation that the uprising demanded. His concern is that the structural features of Bangladeshi politics, including the influence of money in electoral politics, the domination of party machines that are organized around patron-client relationships rather than programmatic commitments, and the persistent influence of the military as a political actor behind the scenes, will tend to reproduce the authoritarian patterns of governance that the uprising was supposed to break.

His specific concern about the political trajectory of the student movement is worth noting. He has expressed admiration for the courage and political creativity that the students demonstrated in the uprising, and he has engaged sympathetically with their attempts to translate their movement's energy into a new political formation. But he has also raised questions about the organizational and ideological foundations of the student-led political projects: about whether the movement has developed the intellectual and programmatic clarity necessary to sustain a genuinely democratic political project in the face of the powerful forces arrayed against it.

59.2 The India-Bangladesh Relationship in 2025 and 2026

The India-Bangladesh relationship has been one of the defining issues of the post-uprising period, and Khan has been one of its most persistent and articulate analysts. His position, as outlined above, combines a principled critique of Indian proto-colonialism with a commitment to the development of a genuinely equitable bilateral relationship, one that respects Bangladesh's sovereignty while acknowledging the real interdependencies of the two countries.

The Hasina government's fall created a profound shock to the Indian foreign policy establishment, which had invested heavily in the Hasina relationship and had treated it as the cornerstone of its Bangladesh policy. India's response to the new political situation in

Bangladesh, which initially combined official acceptance of the Yunus government with an intense media campaign emphasizing the persecution of Hindu minorities and questioning the new government's legitimacy, was experienced in Bangladesh as evidence of Indian hostility to the democratic transformation that the uprising had achieved.

Khan's interventions on this issue have been explicitly directed at both Bangladeshi and Indian audiences. To Bangladeshi audiences, he has argued that the anger at Indian proto-colonialism that the uprising expressed is legitimate and must be politically articulated, but that it must not be allowed to slide into the kind of communal anti-Hindu sentiment that serves the interests of Islamist political formations rather than the democratic aspirations of the majority of the Bangladeshi people. The legitimate grievance against Indian foreign policy must be distinguished from hostility toward the Hindu minority of Bangladesh, who are fellow citizens with equal rights rather than representatives of Indian state power.

To Indian audiences, as in his *Outlook India* piece of September 2024, he has argued that India needs to fundamentally reconceive its relationship with Bangladesh in ways that acknowledge the democratic aspirations of the Bangladeshi people as a legitimate political value that takes precedence over the convenience of any specific political arrangement. The Indian habit of treating Bangladesh as a subsidiary ally whose internal politics should be managed in ways that serve Indian interests is both morally wrong and strategically counterproductive: it generates the very anti-Indian sentiment that it is supposed to prevent, and it undermines the possibility of the genuine partnership of equals that would actually serve both countries' long-term interests.

59.3 Khan's North South University Period and Intellectual Trajectory

Khan's move to North South University in 2025, after more than a decade at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, represents a new phase in his institutional life that coincides with a period of particular political intensity. His new position in the Department of History and Philosophy at North South University reflects his continuing engagement with the foundational questions of historical understanding and philosophical analysis that have organized his intellectual work from the beginning.

In his new institutional context, Khan has continued to pursue the research and teaching agenda that has characterized his career. He has continued to work on translations of important texts into Bengali, seeing this work as a contribution to the project of Bengali intellectual modernity that he has advocated throughout his career. He has continued to engage with the theoretical frameworks of Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and postcolonial theory, bringing them to bear on the specific conditions of contemporary Bangladesh and the region. And he has continued to participate in the public intellectual life of Bangladesh through his talk show appearances, newspaper articles, and public lectures.

The award of the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 2025, while attended by controversy, has brought renewed public attention to his work and has prompted a new round of assessment of his intellectual contributions. The controversy surrounding the award, which touched on questions about the selection process and the treatment of awardees, itself became a case study in the

institutional politics of Bangladeshi cultural life that connects to the analysis of the Bangla Academy that we examined in Part Six.

Khan's intellectual trajectory since the July 2024 uprising has been marked by an intensification of his engagement with political questions, particularly the questions of communalism, minority rights, India-Bangladesh relations, and the conditions for a genuine democratic transition. The urgency of the political moment has drawn him somewhat more toward the role of political commentator and less toward the more strictly philosophical and theoretical work that has characterized some of his most important contributions. Whether this represents a permanent shift or a temporary response to the urgency of the historical moment is something that only subsequent years will reveal.

59.4 The Question of Bangladesh's Future Democratic Identity

Khan's most fundamental contribution to the ongoing debate about Bangladesh's political future is his insistence on the connection between political identity and political possibility. The question of what kind of political community Bangladesh is or wants to be is not simply a question about institutional design; it is a question about values, about the principles that the political community is organized around and the kinds of life that it wants to make possible for its citizens.

His answer to this question is organized around the three founding principles of the Liberation War: equality, human dignity, and social justice. These are principles that he sees as genuinely universal, not in the sense of being unrelated to any particular historical experience but in the sense of expressing values that human beings across cultural and religious traditions have recognized as fundamental to a life worth living. They are also principles that are deeply rooted in the specific history of Bangladesh: they express what the Liberation War was fighting for, what the martyrs of 1971 and the martyrs of the July 2024 uprising died for, what the best of the Bengali tradition, from Lalon Shah to Tagore to Nazrul to Ahmed Sofa, has consistently affirmed.

The challenge that communalism poses to this vision is the challenge of exclusion: the substitution of a narrow community identity for the universal commitment to equality and dignity. Communalism says that equality applies only within the community of the faithful, that dignity is conditional on belonging to the right religious group, that justice is available only to those who share the dominant community's cultural norms. Khan's response to this challenge is the insistence that equality, dignity, and justice are by definition universal in their application: they cannot be genuine equality, genuine dignity, genuine justice if they apply to some but not others.

This insistence is not naive about the difficulties involved in extending genuine equality and dignity to all citizens in a society marked by deep historical inequalities and cultural differences. But it is firm in its refusal to accept the alternative: the reduction of the political community to those who share a particular religious or ethnic identity, and the consignment of those outside that identity to the status of second-class citizens or unwelcome guests in their own homeland.

CHAPTER SIXTY: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNALISM AND SECULARISM

60.1 South Asian Comparative Framework

Khan's analysis of communalism in Bangladesh becomes richer and more precisely located when it is placed in a comparative South Asian framework. The specific character of Bangladeshi communalism, its similarities to and differences from the communalism of India and Pakistan, illuminate the structural features that are common to all three countries and the historical particularities that distinguish them.

India's communal politics, which has intensified dramatically under the BJP-led governments of the 2000s and 2010s and culminated in the rise of an assertive Hindu nationalism under Narendra Modi, presents the clearest large-scale example of how a nominally democratic state can be transformed by communal politics. The specific forms that Hindu nationalism takes in India, including the program of turning Muslims into second-class citizens through legal and extralegal means, the rewriting of history to remove Islamic contributions to Indian civilization, and the normalization of violence against Muslims and other minorities, represent a development that Khan analyzes as a warning about what happens when communalist politics is allowed to reach its logical conclusion in a democracy.

The irony that Khan consistently emphasizes is that Indian communalism and Bangladeshi communalism are not independent phenomena; they are, in important ways, mirror images of each other. The growth of Hindu nationalism in India has been both a cause and a consequence of the growth of Islamic communalism in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Each community's extremists feed on the other's extremism: the Bangladeshi Islamist's claim that Hindus are a fifth column serving Indian interests is strengthened by the Indian Hindu nationalist's treatment of Muslims as enemies of the Hindu nation; the Indian Hindu nationalist's claim that Muslims are disloyal is strengthened by the Bangladeshi Islamist's identification of Bangladesh's Muslim identity as incompatible with tolerance of the Hindu minority.

This mutual reinforcement is what Khan describes, in his interview with *The Daily Star*, as a "South Asian communalist international": the way in which communalists across national and religious boundaries cooperate, not through any formal coordination but through the structural logic of mutual provocation, to create the conditions in which communalist politics can flourish. The only response to this international of communalism, in Khan's analysis, is a "people's international" that organizes around the principles of equality and solidarity across religious and national lines.

60.2 Pakistan and the Experiment with Islamic Nationalism

Pakistan's political history provides the most sustained experiment with Islamic nationalism in South Asia, and Khan's analysis of that experiment is one of the most illuminating aspects of his engagement with the religion-politics relationship. Pakistan was created as a homeland for the

Muslims of the subcontinent, organized around the principle that Muslim identity could serve as the foundation for a modern democratic state. This experiment has, in Khan's assessment, comprehensively failed.

The failure has been both political and ideological. Politically, Pakistan has been governed for much of its history by military dictatorships that have used Islam as a legitimating ideology while pursuing policies that serve the interests of the military-bureaucratic elite rather than the welfare of the majority of the population. The country has been unable to develop stable democratic institutions, to hold the military accountable to civilian governance, to address its profound economic inequalities, or to protect the rights of its religious minorities (Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Shia Muslims have all been subjected to systematic discrimination and periodic violence). The experiment with Islamic nationalism has not produced the just and democratic society that its advocates promised; it has produced instead a state chronically prone to military coups, chronically unable to address poverty and inequality, and chronically engaged in regional conflicts that serve elite interests at the expense of the population's welfare.

The ideological failure is perhaps even more significant. The premise that Muslim identity could serve as the foundation for a modern state was disproved by the events of 1971, when the Muslim-majority eastern wing of Pakistan rebelled against the Muslim-majority western wing and established its own independent state on the basis of cultural and linguistic identity rather than religious solidarity. The failure of Pakistan to hold together as a religious nation demonstrates, in Khan's analysis, the fundamental inadequacy of religious community as a basis for modern political solidarity. The nation-state requires a different kind of solidarity: one organized around shared political commitments, shared democratic institutions, and shared economic interests rather than around the exclusive identity of a particular religious community.

The lesson that Khan draws from Pakistan's experience for Bangladesh is explicit: Bangladesh is not and cannot be Pakistan. Its emergence from the failure of Pakistani religious nationalism was premised on the rejection of the idea that Muslim identity alone could serve as the basis of political community. The attempt to resurrect a Bangladeshi version of that idea, whether in the form of Mawdudian political Islam or in the softer form of "Bangladeshi nationalism" organized around a Muslim-Bengali synthesis, is, in Khan's analysis, a form of historical regression: a return to an idea that Bangladesh's own history has demonstrated to be inadequate.

60.3 Turkey and the Secular-Islamic Tension

Khan's analysis of communalism and secularism also draws on the Turkish experience, which provides another illuminating comparative case. Turkey under Atatürk was the paradigmatic example of a Muslim-majority state that adopted a thoroughgoing program of secular modernization, including the abolition of the caliphate, the elimination of Islamic law from the legal system, the Latin-script reform that replaced Arabic script for Turkish writing, and the systematic exclusion of religion from public life. This program was implemented not by democratic means but by an authoritarian state that imposed secularism on a population many of whom were deeply religious.

The Turkish experiment, in Khan's analysis, demonstrates both the possibilities and the limits of top-down secular modernization. On the positive side, it showed that a Muslim-majority society could successfully modernize its institutions, develop a modern economy, and participate in international society without abandoning its cultural identity. On the negative side, the authoritarian imposition of secularism created a deep cultural divide between the secular urban elite and the religious majority of the population, a divide that Erdogan's AKP has been able to exploit with enormous political effectiveness. The Turkish experience suggests that secularism imposed from above, without the genuine democratic consent of the population, is politically fragile and ultimately self-defeating.

For Bangladesh, the lesson is that the secularism of the 1972 constitution, however intellectually justified, could not be simply declared and legally enacted; it needed to be cultivated through education, cultural development, and the genuine creation of a democratic political culture in which all citizens, regardless of their religious commitments, felt genuinely included and valued. The failure to cultivate this culture, which was partly a failure of political will and partly a result of the authoritarian disruptions that followed 1975, is one of the primary reasons why the secular democratic vision of the Liberation War has been so difficult to sustain.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE: TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN BANGLADESH

61.1 The Pluralist Vision

Khan's positive vision for the relationship between religion and democratic politics in Bangladesh is organized around what he calls democratic pluralism: the commitment to a political order that genuinely includes all citizens, regardless of their religious identity, and that treats the diversity of religious beliefs and practices as a resource for democratic life rather than a problem to be managed or a threat to be suppressed.

This vision draws on several intellectual traditions. From the liberal tradition, it takes the commitment to individual rights and freedom of conscience: the principle that no person should be coerced in matters of religious belief or forced to conform to religious norms they do not accept. From the communitarian tradition, it takes the recognition that religious community is a genuine source of meaning, solidarity, and moral formation that democratic politics must learn to engage with rather than simply restrict. From the postcolonial tradition, it takes the insistence that the specific forms of religious life that have developed in South Asia must be understood on their own terms rather than being measured against a European secular standard.

The specific form of Islamic practice that has developed in Bengal, with its Sufi-inflected spirituality, its tradition of ecstatic poetry in the tradition of Lalon Shah, its emphasis on the divine within the human rather than the human's subjection to divine command, represents, in Khan's analysis, a form of religious life that is genuinely compatible with democratic humanism. The challenge is to recover and amplify this tradition against the imported Middle Eastern

Islamism that Jamaat and its allies have been seeking to impose, and to create the cultural and institutional conditions in which this more humanistic form of Islamic practice can thrive.

61.2 The Role of Education

The role of education in creating the cultural conditions for democratic pluralism is a theme that connects this chapter's concerns to the educational analysis of Part Six. The specific educational challenge posed by the communalism question is the challenge of creating a citizenry that is simultaneously rooted in its own religious and cultural traditions and genuinely committed to the equal rights of fellow citizens who belong to different traditions.

This challenge requires an educational system that teaches children about their own religious tradition with depth and seriousness, but that also teaches them about the religious and cultural traditions of their fellow citizens, and that provides the intellectual tools for distinguishing between the spiritual and ethical dimensions of religious tradition and the specific political formations that exploit religious identity for communalist purposes. It requires an educational system that teaches the history of communalism honestly, including the colonial origins of communal politics, the role of specific political formations in promoting communal violence, and the specific ways in which the principles of equality and human dignity have been violated by communalist politics.

Khan's advocacy for Bengali as the medium of education connects to this challenge in a specific way. One of the functions of the colonial language hierarchy is to make it difficult for students educated in different language tracks to participate in a common public culture. When the students of English-medium schools have little contact with the students of Bengali-medium schools, and when both have little contact with the students of the madrasa system, the conditions for a genuinely shared democratic culture are absent. The cultivation of a common Bengali public culture, one that is accessible to all citizens regardless of their class background or the type of school they attended, is a precondition for the democratic solidarity that genuine pluralism requires.

61.3 Law, Justice, and the Protection of Minorities

Khan's analysis of the legal dimensions of minority protection is informed by his legal education and by his sustained engagement with the traditions of democratic constitutionalism. The constitutional guarantees of equal rights and religious freedom that are enshrined in the Bangladeshi constitution represent, in his analysis, genuine achievements of the democratic tradition that need to be defended, strengthened, and made genuinely operative rather than merely formal.

The specific legal reforms that Khan advocates for the protection of minorities include the strengthening of hate crime legislation, the establishment of effective institutional mechanisms for the investigation and prosecution of communal violence, and the reform of laws and practices that create formal or informal discrimination against minorities. He is particularly focused on the practices of land grabbing and property appropriation that have dispossessed Hindu minorities of property that their families have owned for generations, a practice that is enabled by both formal

legal provisions (the Enemy Property Act, later Vested Property Act, which allowed the state to seize property belonging to people who had migrated to India, affecting predominantly Hindu property owners) and informal social arrangements that protect those who seize minority property from legal accountability.

More broadly, Khan advocates for the development of what he calls a genuine rule of law culture in Bangladesh: a culture in which the formal rights guaranteed by the constitution are genuinely enforced, in which the state's obligation to protect all citizens is taken seriously, and in which the powerful are not able to use the formal apparatus of the law to oppress the weak while themselves enjoying immunity from legal accountability. This rule of law culture is not simply a matter of legal reform; it requires a transformation of the political culture that currently allows powerful actors to violate legal norms with impunity.

CONCLUSION TO PART SEVEN: COMMUNALISM, DEMOCRACY, AND THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR BANGLADESHI MODERNITY

Part Seven has examined one of the most urgent and politically contested dimensions of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project: his analysis of communalism, religious extremism, and the politics of identity in Bangladesh. We have traced his historical analysis of communalism's colonial origins, his account of the partition of 1947 and its consequences, his reading of the founding principles of the Liberation War and their subsequent betrayal, and his analysis of the specific Islamist formations that have been the primary vehicles of communalist politics in contemporary Bangladesh. We have examined his engagement with the Shahbagh movement, his critique of Farhad Mazhar, his analysis of the Rohingya question, and his response to the India-Bangladesh relationship in the post-2024 political environment. We have explored the theoretical framework of democratic secularism that he opposes to both religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism. And we have addressed his most recent public interventions on the questions raised by the July 2024 uprising and its aftermath.

Several themes deserve particular emphasis as we move toward Part Eight.

The first is the historical specificity of Khan's analysis. His account of communalism is not organized around an abstract theory of religion and politics but around a detailed historical analysis of the specific conditions under which communalist politics emerged in Bengal and developed through the colonial period, the partition, and the post-independence history of Bangladesh. This historical specificity is one of the strengths of his analysis: it prevents the kind of ahistorical essentialism that treats communalism as an expression of deep cultural or religious characteristics rather than as a historically produced political formation.

The second theme is the insistence on the material foundations of communal politics. Khan's Marxist instincts lead him to situate communalism within the class structures and material inequalities that make it politically effective, and this insistence prevents the cultural and psychological analysis from losing touch with the real conditions of Bangladeshi life. Communalism is not simply a problem of ideology or false consciousness; it is a problem of the

real economic and political conditions that make communalist identification a rational response to marginalization and powerlessness.

The third theme is the dialectical character of Khan's engagement with religion. He is neither a religious apologist who defends communalist politics in the name of respect for religious tradition, nor a secular fundamentalist who dismisses religious values as irrelevant to democratic politics. He insists on the distinction between the genuine spiritual and ethical dimensions of religious tradition and the specific political formations that exploit religious identity, and he engages affirmatively with the specific form of Islamic humanism that has developed in Bengal while maintaining his critique of Mawdudian political Islam and its Bangladeshi manifestations.

The fourth theme is the urgency of the present political moment. Khan's analysis of communalism is not merely historical or theoretical; it is a contribution to a political struggle that is ongoing and whose outcome is genuinely uncertain. The July 2024 uprising created a moment of genuine possibility for the democratic transformation of Bangladesh, but that possibility is threatened by the communalist forces that are seeking to capture the post-uprising political environment for their own purposes. Khan's intellectual interventions are part of the effort to prevent that capture and to maintain the clarity about what the uprising was fighting for that is necessary for its principles to be realized.

Part Eight of this textbook will turn to Khan's analysis of political economy and development theory, examining how his Marxist and postcolonial frameworks inform his analysis of Bangladesh's economic development, its integration into global capitalism, and the specific challenges of development in a small, densely populated, and historically marginalized country.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART SEVEN

Key Concepts in Communalism, Secularism, and Identity Politics

Communalism (South Asian usage): The political mobilization of religious community identity in ways that create antagonism between communities and undermine the possibility of a common civic life across religious lines. Distinguished from the North American usage of "communal" (which has positive connotations of sharing and cooperation) and analyzed by Khan as a historically specific political formation produced under colonial conditions.

The Permanent Settlement of 1793: The land tenure system introduced by the British East India Company in Bengal, which created a new class of landlords (zamindars) with permanent property rights in exchange for fixed revenue payments to the colonial state. The settlement had profound consequences for class structure in Bengal, creating the conditions for the economic exploitation of the Muslim peasantry by the predominantly Hindu landlord class.

Hakimiyya: Arabic term meaning sovereignty, used by Maulana Mawdudi as the central principle of his political theology. Mawdudi argued that sovereignty belongs to God alone (al-hakimiyya lillah), and that any political system organized around human sovereignty, including

democracy, is a form of idolatry. This principle provided the theological basis for Jamaat-e-Islami's opposition to the Bengali nationalist movement in 1971.

Transitional Justice: The set of judicial and non-judicial measures that societies undertake in order to address large-scale human rights violations committed during periods of authoritarian rule, armed conflict, or political repression. Khan's advocacy for the war crimes tribunal process is an application of transitional justice principles to the specific context of Bangladesh's accountability for the crimes of 1971.

Islamic Syncretism: The tradition, historically dominant in Bengali Islam, of incorporating elements of Sufi spirituality, Hindu devotional practice, and Bengali folk religion into Islamic religious life, producing a form of Islam that is specifically adapted to the cultural context of Bengal. Khan analyzes this tradition, represented most powerfully by Lalon Shah, as a resource for democratic humanist politics.

The Enemy Property Act (and Vested Property Act): Colonial and post-colonial legislation that allowed the state to seize property belonging to citizens who had migrated to enemy or designated foreign territories. In Bangladesh, the provisions of this legislation were applied primarily to Hindu property owners who had migrated to India, effectively enabling the systematic dispossession of Hindu minorities that has contributed to their dramatic demographic decline.

Badiou's Event: The French philosopher Alain Badiou's concept of a rupture in the ordinary course of history that creates genuinely new political possibilities. Khan applies this concept to the July 2024 uprising, analyzing it as an event in the Badiouian sense: a moment when the young people of Bangladesh broke through the wall of fear and political paralysis that had prevented effective resistance to the Hasina regime.

Democratic Secularism: Khan's formulation for the form of secularism appropriate to a postcolonial Muslim-majority society. Contrasted with both religious fundamentalism (which seeks to organize political life around religious norms) and secular fundamentalism (which seeks to eliminate religious values from political life), democratic secularism is organized around the principles of equal rights, democratic governance, and human dignity, treating religious diversity as a resource for democratic life rather than a threat to be managed.

Jouissance (Lacanian): A concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis that refers to a kind of excessive enjoyment or surplus pleasure that goes beyond the ordinary pleasure principle. Khan deploys this concept in his analysis of communal violence, arguing that the Other (the member of another religious community) is conceived in the imaginary of communal politics as possessing a special jouissance, an excess of enjoyment that both fascinates and repels the communal subject, and that the destruction of the Other's property and the assertion of dominance over the Other's body is experienced as a reclaiming of this jouissance.

The Politics of Recognition: A tradition of political philosophy associated particularly with the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, which argues that modern identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence and that democratic politics must engage with the demand of

individuals and groups for the recognition and affirmation of their cultural identities. Khan draws on this tradition while criticizing its insufficient attention to the material and structural dimensions of identity formation.

Discussion Questions for Part Seven

1. Khan argues that communalism is a historically specific political formation produced under colonial conditions, not an expression of deep cultural or religious characteristics. Do you find this historical argument convincing? What evidence would you point to in support of or against it? How does this historical argument relate to the policy question of what to do about communalism in contemporary Bangladesh?
2. Khan identifies the three founding principles of the Liberation War as equality, human dignity, and social justice, and he uses these principles as the standard by which all subsequent political formations must be judged. Is this an appropriate standard? Are there other values that should also be included in the founding principles? How does this standard apply to the complex political situation of Bangladesh in 2024-2026?
3. Khan is highly critical of the failure of successive Bangladeshi governments to hold perpetrators of communal violence accountable, arguing that this failure has had profound consequences for political culture. What would genuine accountability for communal violence look like? What institutional mechanisms would be necessary to provide it? What political obstacles stand in the way of establishing such mechanisms?
4. Khan draws a distinction between the genuine spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islamic tradition, represented in his analysis by figures like Lalou Shah, and the specific political formations that exploit religious identity for communalist purposes. How stable is this distinction? Can it be maintained in a context where communalist political formations present themselves as the authentic representatives of Islam?
5. Khan's analysis of the India-Bangladesh relationship frames Indian foreign policy as a form of proto-colonialism. Is this framing accurate and useful? What are the strongest arguments for and against it? How should Bangladesh navigate its relationship with India in ways that serve its own interests and democratic values?
6. The July 2024 uprising brought together a diverse coalition that included both secular democratic forces and Islamist political organizations. Khan analyzes this coalition with a combination of support for its democratic achievements and concern about its communalist elements. How should democratic forces navigate alliances with organizations whose commitment to democratic values is partial or conditional?
7. Khan advocates for democratic secularism as the appropriate framework for the relationship between religion and politics in Bangladesh. What are the practical implications of this framework? How does it differ from both the secularism of the 1972 constitution and the various forms of political Islam that have competed for influence in Bangladeshi politics?
8. The demographic decline of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, from approximately 28 percent of the population in 1947 to approximately 8 percent at present, represents a profound failure of the promise of equal citizenship. What would a genuine commitment

to reversing this trend require? What specific policy measures and institutional changes would be necessary?

Extended Reading List for Part Seven

On the History of Communalism in South Asia: Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, for the foundational historical analysis of communalism as a colonial production; Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, for the detailed history of the Bengal partition; and Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, for the broader regional context.

On the Bangladesh Liberation War: Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War*, for a controversial but important attempt at balanced historical analysis; Nikhil Chakravarty, ed., *Bangladesh Liberation War: The Documented Testimony*, for primary sources; and Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, for a Pakistani military officer's account.

On Islamist Politics in South Asia: Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, for the intellectual history of Islamist thought in the region; Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, for the most authoritative account of Mawdudi's political theology; and Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, for the historical context of Bengali Muslim identity formation.

On Religion and Democracy: John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, for the liberal democratic theory of the relationship between comprehensive doctrines (including religion) and public reason; Jurgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," for the post-secular turn in democratic theory; and Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, for the postcolonial critique of secular liberal frameworks.

On the Politics of Recognition: Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" (in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann), the foundational essay; and Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, for the Hegelian social theory of recognition.

On the Rohingya Crisis: Azeem Ibrahim, *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, for a detailed account of the crisis; and the International Court of Justice proceedings in the case brought by Gambia against Myanmar under the Genocide Convention, for the legal dimensions.

On Bangladesh's Political History: Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh: The Struggle for Political Development*, for the foundational political science account; Ali Riaz, *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence*, for the most comprehensive recent analysis; and Rehman Sobhan, *Bangladesh: Problems of Governance*, for the economic and institutional dimensions.

On the 2024 Uprising: The UN Human Rights fact-finding report on the Bangladesh protests, published February 2025, for the authoritative international human rights assessment; and the

emerging academic literature on the uprising, including the articles in the special issues of leading South Asian studies journals published in 2024 and 2025.

End of Part Seven

Part Eight: Political Economy, Development, and the Critique of Global Capitalism: Salimullah Khan's Economic Analysis from Central Banking Theory to Postcolonial Development Critique will follow.

PART EIGHT: POLITICAL ECONOMY, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE CRITIQUE OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Salimullah Khan's Economic Analysis from Central Banking Theory to Postcolonial Development Critique

PART COORDINATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART EIGHT

Part Seven of this textbook examined Salimullah Khan's analysis of communalism, religious extremism, and the politics of identity in Bangladesh. We traced his historical account of communalism's colonial origins, his analysis of the specific Islamist formations that carry communalist politics in contemporary Bangladesh, his engagement with the Shahbagh movement and the July 2024 uprising, and the theoretical framework of democratic secularism that he opposes to both religious fundamentalism and the narrow secular liberalism that fails to address the material conditions giving communalism its political traction. We concluded with his vision of democratic pluralism grounded in the three founding principles of the Liberation War: equality, human dignity, and social justice.

Part Eight turns to a dimension of Khan's intellectual work that receives less public attention than his more overtly political and cultural interventions but that provides, in many ways, the material foundation on which everything else rests: his analysis of political economy, development theory, and the critique of global capitalism. This dimension of his work flows most directly from his doctoral training at The New School for Social Research, where he wrote his dissertation on the history of central banking in England under the supervision of the heterodox Marxist economist Duncan K. Foley. But it also extends across the full range of his intellectual production, surfacing in his analysis of Bangladesh's colonial economic history, his critique of neoliberal development ideology, his engagement with the theories of dependency and uneven development that have characterized progressive development economics from Raul Prebisch through Andre Gunder Frank to the present, and his specific diagnoses of the economic dimensions of Bangladesh's most pressing political problems.

Khan is not an economist in the narrow professional sense. He does not produce the technical models, the regression analyses, or the formal theoretical apparatus that characterize professional academic economics. His engagement with economic questions is always situated within a broader philosophical, historical, and political analysis that refuses the disciplinary separation of economics from politics, culture, and psychology that mainstream economics requires. This refusal is not a limitation but a strength: it allows him to address the connections between economic structures and political formations, between material conditions and cultural life, between the specific character of the Bangladeshi economy and the specific quality of Bangladeshi democratic consciousness, that remain invisible within the disciplinary confines of mainstream economic analysis.

Part Eight is organized around several interlocking themes. We begin with a detailed examination of Khan's doctoral dissertation on central banking in England, because understanding this work is essential for understanding the theoretical foundations of his economic analysis. We then turn to his account of the colonial political economy of Bengal, tracing the ways in which the British colonial system created the specific patterns of underdevelopment and economic dependency that shape Bangladesh's contemporary economic situation. We examine his engagement with the tradition of dependency theory and postcolonial development economics, from Prebisch and the Latin American structuralists through the world-systems theorists to the most recent contributions to heterodox development economics. We analyze his critique of neoliberal development ideology and its application to Bangladesh, with particular attention to the specific forms that neoliberal policy has taken in the garment industry, the microfinance sector, and the remittance economy. We address his analysis of money, credit, and financial power as dimensions of political economy that are central to understanding both the colonial history of Bengal and the contemporary dynamics of global capitalism. And we conclude with his vision of an alternative development path for Bangladesh: one organized around the principles of equity, democratic sovereignty, and genuine human development rather than around the narrow metrics of GDP growth and market integration that dominate mainstream development discourse.

Throughout this part, we will find Khan's characteristic analytical method at work: the insistence on situating any particular economic phenomenon within its full historical and political context, the deployment of theoretical frameworks drawn from multiple traditions in the service of concrete analysis, and the constant orientation toward the practical question of what the analysis means for the possibilities of a genuinely democratic and equitable Bangladeshi society.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO: THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION: THEORIES OF CENTRAL BANKING IN ENGLAND, 1793-1877

62.1 The Choice of Topic and Its Significance

When Salimullah Khan arrived at The New School for Social Research in New York in the late 1980s to begin his doctoral studies in economics under Duncan K. Foley, he chose as his dissertation topic the history of central banking theory in England during the period from 1793 to

1877. This choice of topic might seem, at first glance, remote from the questions of postcolonial politics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Bangladeshi cultural life that have made Khan a prominent public intellectual. In fact, the connection is intimate and revealing, and understanding it is essential for understanding the deepest theoretical foundations of Khan's economic thought.

The period from 1793 to 1877 that Khan chose to study is one of the most intellectually rich and practically consequential periods in the history of monetary theory and central banking. It begins with the suspension of gold convertibility of the Bank of England note in 1797, an event forced by the financial demands of the Napoleonic Wars, and it extends through the Bank Charter Act of 1844 (which established the institutional framework that would govern English monetary policy for decades), the debates of the 1850s and 1860s about the causes and management of financial crises, and the Bank Act crisis of 1866, when the collapse of the discount house Overend Gurney and Company forced the Bank of England to act as lender of last resort in a way that dramatically expanded its role in the monetary system.

This period encompasses some of the most important intellectual debates in the history of economics about the fundamental nature of money, credit, and the relationship between financial activity and real economic production. The central controversy of the period was between what became known as the Currency School and the Banking School, a controversy that engaged some of the most important economic thinkers of the Victorian era, including David Ricardo, Henry Thornton, Thomas Tooke, John Stuart Mill, and Walter Bagehot.

62.2 The Currency School and the Banking School: A Theoretical Overview

The controversy between the Currency School and the Banking School is one of the most important and least taught episodes in the history of economic thought, and Khan's doctoral research on this controversy is one of his most important intellectual contributions, even though it has been largely inaccessible to the Bengali-reading public for whom most of his subsequent work is intended. Understanding the substantive content of this controversy is essential for understanding Khan's subsequent economic analysis, because the theoretical issues at stake in the Victorian debate remain unresolved and are directly relevant to the most important monetary policy questions of the present day.

The Currency School, whose primary intellectual architects were David Ricardo and Lord Overstone (Samuel Jones Loyd), held that the proper basis of the monetary system was a strict correspondence between the quantity of money in circulation and the quantity of gold held in reserve. On this view, a currency note is simply a representation of a quantity of gold; its value is guaranteed by the gold behind it; and the proper management of the monetary system requires that the quantity of notes in circulation be strictly limited to the quantity of gold reserves available. If gold flows out of the country (as it would when the balance of trade was unfavorable), the quantity of notes should be reduced correspondingly, and the resulting tightening of credit would reduce prices and economic activity until the trade balance was restored and gold returned.

The Currency School view was enshrined in the Bank Charter Act of 1844, which divided the Bank of England into two departments: the Issue Department, which held the gold reserves and

issued notes in strict proportion to them, and the Banking Department, which conducted ordinary commercial banking operations. The Act's intention was to make the monetary system automatic: by constraining note issue to the quantity of gold, it would eliminate the discretionary judgments of Bank officials and replace them with the impersonal discipline of the gold standard.

The Banking School, whose primary intellectual champion was Thomas Tooke (author of the monumental *History of Prices*), disputed the Currency School's theory of money on both empirical and theoretical grounds. Empirically, Tooke and his colleagues demonstrated that the Currency School's account of how money affects prices was incorrect: in practice, prices could rise or fall without corresponding changes in the quantity of notes in circulation, and the quantity of notes in circulation tended to follow rather than cause changes in commercial activity. Theoretically, the Banking School argued that the Currency School had misunderstood the nature of money itself: money was not simply a representation of gold but a form of credit, a claim against the banking system that was created by the act of lending. The quantity of money in circulation was therefore determined not by arbitrary decisions of the Bank's directors but by the demands of commerce: money was issued when there was a genuine commercial need for it and retired when that need was satisfied.

This theoretical difference had profound practical implications. If the Currency School was right, the proper management of the monetary system was simply a matter of maintaining the gold standard and allowing its automatic discipline to regulate the economy. If the Banking School was right, the monetary system required active management by the central bank, which needed to exercise judgment about when to extend and when to restrict credit, how to respond to financial crises, and how to balance the demands of commercial activity against the constraints of the gold reserve.

62.3 Khan's Analysis and Its Implications

Khan's dissertation argues, drawing on both the historical evidence and the theoretical frameworks available, for a position that substantially vindicates the Banking School's analysis while locating its limitations within the broader framework of Marxist political economy. His argument has several dimensions that are worth examining in detail.

First, Khan develops an account of the specifically capitalist character of the monetary system that goes beyond the positions of either the Currency School or the Banking School. Both schools, despite their theoretical differences, shared a framework in which money was understood primarily in terms of its exchange functions: as a medium of exchange, a measure of value, and a store of value. Neither adequately theorized the specifically capitalist character of money as capital: money that is advanced in order to generate more money, that enters into the production process as constant and variable capital, and whose circulation is organized around the production and realization of surplus value rather than around the satisfaction of use values.

Marx's theory of money and credit, which Khan reads through the lens of Foley's own influential contributions to Marxist monetary theory, provides the framework within which the Currency School-Banking School controversy can be understood as a conflict about the nature of capitalist money rather than simply about the technical management of the monetary system. The

Currency School's insistence on the gold standard reflects a particular ideological vision of capitalism as a system organized around the equivalence of exchange: the idea that market transactions are fundamentally transactions in which equivalent values are exchanged, and that the monetary system should reflect this equivalence by being grounded in a commodity (gold) with intrinsic value. The Banking School's account of credit money reflects the actual operation of capitalist finance: the creation of purchasing power through lending, which precedes and enables production rather than simply representing it.

Second, Khan uses the history of the Bank Charter Act and its consequences to develop an account of the relationship between monetary policy and financial crises that anticipates several of the most important debates in contemporary monetary theory and policy. The suspension of the Bank Charter Act during the financial crises of 1847, 1857, and 1866, which required the Bank of England to issue notes beyond the limits the Act imposed in order to prevent the collapse of the commercial banking system, demonstrated the fundamental inadequacy of the Currency School's framework for managing a developed capitalist financial system. The Act, which was supposed to provide automatic monetary discipline, repeatedly had to be suspended when that discipline threatened to produce financial catastrophe. The pattern of these suspensions, Khan argues, illustrates the fundamental tension between the logic of commodity money (which demands a fixed relationship between money and gold) and the logic of credit money (which demands that the monetary system be able to expand to meet the needs of a crisis-prone capitalist economy).

Third, Khan situates the Currency School-Banking School controversy within the specific political context of the Victorian political economy, analyzing the class interests and political alignments that shaped the positions adopted by different economic thinkers. The Currency School's ideology served the interests of the City of London's financial establishment, which benefited from the discipline imposed by the gold standard on government fiscal policy and on the terms of credit available to industry. The Banking School's more flexible account of credit creation served the interests of commercial and industrial capital, which required access to credit at rates and quantities determined by commercial needs rather than by the arbitrary constraint of the gold reserve.

This class analysis of economic theory is one of Khan's most characteristic analytical moves, and its application to the Victorian monetary debates gives it particular force. The seemingly technical debates about the proper reserve ratio for the Bank of England or the appropriate definition of the money supply were, in fact, debates about who would control the monetary system and in whose interests it would be operated. This insight, that monetary theory is never politically neutral but always reflects specific interests and specific power relations, is one that Khan has carried from his doctoral research into all his subsequent economic analysis.

62.4 Implications for Contemporary Monetary Theory

Khan's analysis of the Currency School-Banking School controversy has implications that extend well beyond the Victorian period into the most important monetary policy debates of the present day. The fundamental theoretical questions at stake in the Victorian controversy, about the nature of money, the relationship between credit and real economic activity, and the proper

management of the monetary system during periods of financial instability, are the same questions that have dominated monetary policy debates in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 economic disruption, and the inflationary pressures of 2021-2023.

The debate between advocates of strict monetary rules (the modern heirs of the Currency School) and advocates of discretionary monetary policy (the modern heirs of the Banking School) has taken new forms in the era of fiat currencies, global financial markets, and central bank independence, but it remains structured by the same fundamental tension that Khan's dissertation identified: the tension between the logic of commodity money and the logic of credit money, between the discipline of the market and the active management of the financial system by public institutions.

The emergence of Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) as a significant intellectual movement in heterodox economics since the early 2010s represents the most radical recent development of the Banking School tradition, and Khan has engaged with it in his later economic commentary. MMT's core claim, that a government that issues its own currency can never run out of money and therefore faces no purely financial constraint on public spending, draws on the same fundamental insight that the Banking School developed in the Victorian period: that money is a form of credit created by the monetary system, not a representation of some pre-existing commodity value. The political implications of this claim, which include the rejection of austerity as an economic necessity and the affirmation of the state's capacity for active fiscal intervention in the economy, connect directly to Khan's broader political commitments.

62.5 Duncan K. Foley and the New School Tradition

Khan's doctoral supervisor Duncan K. Foley was, and continues to be, one of the most important heterodox economists in the United States, and his influence on Khan's economic thought deserves extended attention. Foley's work spans several decades and addresses questions from macroeconomics and growth theory to the history of economic thought and the theory of complexity in economic systems, and throughout it is animated by a commitment to a rigorously Marxist analysis of the capitalist economy that is grounded in a deep engagement with the classical political economy tradition from Adam Smith through David Ricardo to Marx himself.

Foley's most important theoretical contribution, developed in his 1982 paper "The Value of Money, the Value of Labor Power, and the Marxian Transformation Problem," is his reformulation of the Marxian theory of value that became known as the "New Interpretation" of Marx. This reformulation addressed one of the most technically contested questions in Marxist economics, the transformation problem, which concerns the relationship between the labor values of commodities and their prices of production. Foley's solution to this problem, which involves defining the monetary expression of labor time (MELT) as the ratio of the money value of the net product to the total labor time expended in its production, provides a rigorous foundation for Marx's theory of surplus value that makes it consistent with the empirically observable relationship between money prices and labor time.

For Khan, whose doctoral research was directly supervised by Foley and who engaged deeply with his theoretical framework, this Marxist foundation provides the analytical bedrock for his

economic analysis. The theory of surplus value, understood as the difference between the value that workers produce and the value they receive as wages, provides the framework for understanding the specific character of capitalist economic relations as relations of exploitation rather than as relations of fair exchange. This theoretical foundation is what distinguishes Khan's economic analysis from mainstream development economics, which treats the market economy as a system of voluntary exchange in which all participants receive their just reward, and connects it instead to the tradition of critical political economy that understands development and underdevelopment as aspects of a single global system organized around the production and appropriation of surplus value.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE: THE COLONIAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BENGAL

63.1 The Drain of Wealth

Khan's account of the colonial political economy of Bengal begins with the phenomenon that Dadabhai Naoroji famously analyzed in *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901): the systematic drain of wealth from India to Britain through the mechanisms of colonial administration and trade. Naoroji's drain theory, which identified the specific channels through which the surplus product of Indian labor was transferred to Britain without any economic return to India, was one of the most important intellectual contributions of the Indian nationalist tradition, and its core insights remain relevant to the analysis of colonial economic history.

The mechanisms of the drain that Khan analyzes in his account of colonial Bengal include several specific channels. The most important was the system of "Home Charges": the payments that the Indian government was required to make to the British government for the costs of the colonial administration, including the salaries of British civil servants and military officers (who were paid in Britain), the interest on the debt incurred to construct the railway system (which was built with capital raised in London at guaranteed interest rates charged to Indian revenues), and the cost of the military forces maintained in India by the British government.

These Home Charges represented a systematic transfer of wealth from India to Britain that had no productive equivalent: India received no goods or services in exchange for these payments; they were pure tribute. The scale of the drain was substantial: estimates vary, but most serious historians accept that the drain amounted to a significant fraction of India's GDP throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, representing a massive constraint on the capital available for Indian economic development.

In the case of Bengal specifically, the drain took additional specific forms that Khan analyzes with particular care. The export of raw jute from Bengal, which by the late nineteenth century had made Bengal the world's primary supplier of jute fiber, created a pattern of unequal exchange that is one of the primary examples of what Prebisch and the Latin American structuralists would later theorize as the deterioration of the terms of trade for primary commodity exporters. Bengal exported raw jute and imported manufactured jute products from

the Scottish jute mills in Dundee, a pattern in which the value added by manufacturing accrued to Scotland while Bengal received only the price of the raw material.

The development of jute manufacturing in Calcutta in the second half of the nineteenth century challenged this pattern, as Indian entrepreneurs established jute mills that competed with the Dundee mills. But the development of this industry was constrained by the specific political economy of colonial Bengal in ways that Khan analyzes through the framework of what economic historians call "deindustrialization": the destruction of existing manufacturing capacity by the competition of cheaper manufactured goods from the colonial metropole. The cotton textile industry of Bengal, which had been one of the most sophisticated and productive in the pre-colonial world, was systematically destroyed in the early nineteenth century by the competition of cheap machine-made cotton textiles from Lancashire, a process that the British government actively facilitated through the tariff policies it imposed on India.

63.2 The Permanent Settlement and Agrarian Capitalism

Khan's analysis of the colonial political economy of Bengal gives particular attention to the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and its consequences for the structure of the Bengali agrarian economy. We encountered this analysis in Part Seven in connection with the class basis of communal politics, but it deserves extended treatment here in the context of political economy.

The Permanent Settlement was one of the most consequential acts of colonial economic policy in the history of India, and its consequences for Bengal were particularly profound. The Settlement created a new class of landlords, the zamindars, with permanent property rights in their lands and a fixed obligation to pay revenue to the colonial state. The intention of the Settlement's architects, particularly Lord Cornwallis, was to create in Bengal something analogous to the English landlord class: a class of property-owning individuals with a permanent stake in the land who would invest in agricultural improvement and provide a stable base for colonial revenue collection.

In practice, the Settlement produced very different results. The new zamindars, whose primary obligation to the colonial state was the payment of a fixed revenue, had little incentive to invest in agricultural improvement; their primary interest was in maximizing the rent they could extract from the peasantry. The systematic rack-renting of the Bengali peasantry by the zamindars, who were able to raise rents as the productivity of the land improved while their own revenue obligation remained fixed, produced a form of agrarian capitalism in which the surplus product of peasant labor was appropriated primarily by an unproductive landlord class rather than being invested in productive development.

The consequences for the Bengali peasantry were devastating and long-lasting. The permanent indebtedness of the peasantry to moneylenders and landlords, the insecurity of tenure that prevented peasant investment in land improvement, and the systematic extraction of surplus through rent created the conditions of agrarian poverty that would characterize rural Bengal through the colonial period and into the post-independence era. Khan traces the connection between this colonial agrarian structure and the patterns of rural poverty and landlessness that remain central features of the Bangladeshi countryside to the present day, arguing that the

colonial legacy is not simply a historical memory but a living structural constraint on the possibilities of agricultural development.

63.3 The Bengal Famine of 1943

The Bengal Famine of 1943, which killed between two and three million people in Bengal and which constitutes one of the gravest man-made disasters of the twentieth century, occupies a central place in Khan's analysis of the colonial political economy of Bengal. His engagement with the famine draws on the foundational scholarship of Amartya Sen, whose analysis in *Poverty and Famines* demonstrated that the 1943 famine was not caused by a shortage of food supply but by a failure of entitlements: a situation in which the purchasing power of the rural poor collapsed while food was available in the market at prices they could not afford to pay.

Khan extends Sen's entitlement analysis in several ways that reflect his Marxist political economic framework. First, he situates the famine within the specific political economy of wartime Bengal: the demands of the British war effort, including the denial of boats to prevent their use by a potential Japanese invader (which disrupted the fishing economy and the distribution of food by water), the procurement of rice for military use, and the inflationary pressures created by military expenditure, were all direct consequences of colonial policy decisions that contributed to the collapse of rural food entitlements. The famine was not simply a market failure; it was a product of the specific political economy of colonial rule in a period of global conflict.

Second, Khan traces the connection between the famine and the colonial agrarian structure that the Permanent Settlement had created. The vulnerability of the Bengali rural poor to famine conditions was not accidental; it was the product of the specific character of the colonial agrarian economy, in which the majority of the rural population had been reduced to a condition of permanent poverty and insecurity that left them with no reserves of food or money to draw on when their immediate income collapsed. The famine exposed what the normal operation of the colonial economy concealed: the structural impoverishment of the Bengali peasantry that had been accumulating over generations.

Third, Khan uses the famine as an illustration of what he sees as the fundamental character of colonial capitalism: a system organized around the extraction of surplus value from the colonial periphery for the benefit of the metropolitan center, with no obligation to ensure the welfare of the colonial population. The Churchill government's response to the Bengal famine, which was characterized by a remarkable indifference to the suffering of the Bengali people and by a continuing prioritization of metropolitan needs over colonial welfare, illustrates in its most extreme form the logic of colonial political economy that Khan analyzes throughout his work.

63.4 The Industrial Structure of Colonial Bengal and Its Legacy

Khan's account of the colonial political economy of Bengal also addresses the specific structure of industrial development that colonialism produced, and its consequences for the post-independence economic situation of Bangladesh. The industrial economy of Bengal under colonialism was concentrated in Calcutta and its immediate vicinity, which functioned as the

metropolitan center of the Bengali economy: the location of the major industries (jute mills, textile mills, engineering works), the financial institutions (banks and insurance companies), and the commercial houses through which the colonial trade was organized.

Eastern Bengal, which would eventually become Bangladesh, was primarily a supplier of raw materials to this metropolitan industrial economy: raw jute, raw cotton, rice and other agricultural products. It had very little industrial infrastructure of its own, and the commercial and financial infrastructure that facilitated its trade was located primarily in Calcutta rather than in Dhaka or any other eastern city. This spatial structure of the colonial economy created a pattern of dependency between eastern and western Bengal that would have profound consequences for the economic development of Bangladesh after independence.

The partition of Bengal in 1947, which created the border between East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and West Bengal (India), severed the economic connections between eastern Bengal's agricultural production and western Bengal's industrial processing capacity in ways that were economically devastating for both sides but particularly for the east. East Pakistan suddenly found itself without access to the Calcutta-based industries and financial institutions on which its economy depended, without the skilled workers and entrepreneurs who had been primarily Hindu and who mostly migrated to India, and without the export infrastructure through which its primary commodity (jute) had been sold on world markets.

Khan's analysis of this economic disruption is one of the foundational elements of his account of Bangladesh's development challenge. The poverty and underdevelopment of Bangladesh, he insists, cannot be understood simply as the product of geography, culture, or inadequate policy; it must be understood historically, as the legacy of a colonial economic structure that systematically extracted wealth from the region, concentrated whatever industrial development occurred in the metropolitan center, and then, at independence, severed the connections on which even this distorted economy depended.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR: DEPENDENCY THEORY AND WORLD SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

64.1 Prebisch and the Latin American Structuralists

Khan's engagement with the tradition of dependency theory and development economics begins with the foundational contributions of the Latin American structuralists, particularly Raul Prebisch and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) that he led from 1950. Prebisch's central contribution was the Prebisch-Singer thesis, which argued that the terms of trade between primary commodity exporters (the "periphery" of the world economy, primarily developing countries) and manufactured goods exporters (the "center," primarily developed countries) systematically deteriorated over time: primary commodity prices fell relative to manufactured goods prices, meaning that peripheral countries had to export ever-increasing quantities of primary commodities to maintain the same level of imports of manufactured goods.

The Prebisch-Singer thesis was a challenge to the standard trade theory argument that free trade was mutually beneficial for all participants: it showed that the specific structure of the global economy, in which center countries produced manufactured goods with high income elasticity of demand and rapid productivity growth while peripheral countries produced primary commodities with low income elasticity and slow productivity growth, produced a systematic inequality in the distribution of the gains from trade. The policy implication that Prebisch drew from this analysis was import substitution industrialization (ISI): the deliberate development of domestic manufacturing capacity behind protective tariffs, as a way of escaping the trap of primary commodity dependency.

Khan's engagement with Prebisch is critical as well as appropriative. He finds the Prebisch-Singer thesis analytically compelling as a description of the structural character of the global economy and its consequences for developing countries, and he uses it as a framework for analyzing the specific situation of Bangladesh, which has been overwhelmingly dependent on a single primary commodity export (jute, and later garments) throughout its post-independence history. But he is also aware of the limitations of the structuralist framework, which tends to analyze the global economy in terms of structural positions (center versus periphery) without adequately theorizing the class relations and power dynamics that produce and reproduce those structural positions.

The failure of ISI policies in Latin America, which by the 1970s had produced large, inefficient industrial sectors that required permanent protection and had generated significant debt while failing to produce the broad-based development that their advocates had promised, is something that Khan engages with honestly rather than dismissing. His assessment is that the failure of ISI was not primarily a failure of the theory (the Prebisch-Singer diagnosis of structural inequality in global trade was essentially correct) but a failure of the political conditions under which it was implemented: ISI policies were captured by elite interests that used them to create protected rents rather than to build genuinely competitive industrial capacity.

64.2 Frank, Cardoso, and the Debate About Dependency

The next major development in the dependency theory tradition, associated with Andre Gunder Frank's concept of the "development of underdevelopment," represents a more radical challenge to the mainstream development economics of the 1950s and 1960s than the structuralist tradition. Frank's core argument, developed most fully in *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967), is that the underdevelopment of peripheral countries is not a stage in a universal process of development (as modernization theory implied) but a specific product of their historical integration into the capitalist world economy. The same processes of capitalist development that produced prosperity in the center produced poverty in the periphery, because the global capitalist economy was organized around the extraction of surplus from the periphery for the benefit of the center.

Frank's formula that underdevelopment is the "development of underdevelopment" captures the key insight: the poverty of the periphery is not a failure of development but an achievement of a specific form of development, one organized around the production of wealth for others rather than for the peripheral population itself. The colonial history of Bengal that Khan analyzes is a

paradigmatic illustration of Frank's thesis: the systematic extraction of wealth through the drain, the deindustrialization of Bengali manufacturing, the creation of a colonial agrarian structure organized around rent extraction rather than productive development, all represent the development of underdevelopment in Frank's sense.

Khan's engagement with the subsequent debate between Frank's dependency theory and the more qualified positions developed by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto in *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (1971) is one of the most intellectually important aspects of his development economic analysis. Cardoso and Faletto's critique of Frank was that his framework was too structurally deterministic: it left no room for the possibility of development in peripheral countries, because it treated the structure of the world economy as determining the fate of peripheral countries irrespective of their internal political and economic dynamics. Their alternative concept of "associated-dependent development" recognized that peripheral countries could achieve significant economic growth within the world capitalist system, but argued that this growth would be conditioned by its dependent character: it would be growth that served the interests of transnational capital and local elites more than the welfare of the majority of the population.

Khan finds the Cardoso-Faletto framework more analytically adequate than Frank's more deterministic version of dependency theory, because it allows for the internal political dynamics of developing countries to play a genuine role in shaping development outcomes. But he also insists on maintaining the core insight of dependency theory: that the integration of peripheral countries into the global capitalist economy on unequal terms creates structural constraints on the character of possible development that cannot be overcome simply by better domestic policies. The specific form that Bangladesh's post-independence development has taken, with its heavy reliance on a single export industry (garments) organized primarily around the production of value-added for global capital rather than the development of a diversified and domestically integrated economy, reflects the dynamics of dependent development that Cardoso and Faletto analyzed.

64.3 Wallerstein and World-Systems Theory

Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, developed from the 1970s onward in his multi-volume work *The Modern World-System*, represents another important resource for Khan's economic analysis. Wallerstein's framework locates individual national economies within the broader structure of the capitalist world-system, which he analyzes as organized around three zones: the core (the developed capitalist countries of North America and Western Europe, and Japan), the periphery (the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America), and the semi-periphery (intermediate countries that perform functions of both core and peripheral economies).

What is most important in Wallerstein's framework for Khan's analysis is the concept of the semi-periphery, because it provides a way of analyzing the specific position of Bangladesh within the global economy that is more nuanced than the simple core-periphery binary. Bangladesh is not simply a peripheral country in the sense that Frank used the term; it is a country that has achieved significant economic growth over the past three decades through its

integration into global value chains, but that integration has been on terms that reproduce rather than overcome its dependent character. Bangladesh is closer to the bottom of the semi-periphery than to the core, but its specific position in the global division of labor, as a supplier of cheap garment labor to the consumption markets of the North, gives it a specific form of economic integration that is different from the primary commodity dependency that characterized its colonial and early post-independence economy.

Khan uses the world-systems framework to situate his analysis of Bangladesh's garment industry, which is by far the most important sector of the contemporary Bangladeshi economy and which has generated the growth that has reduced poverty and transformed the social landscape of Bangladesh over the past thirty years. His analysis, which we will examine in detail in a subsequent chapter, refuses both the celebratory account of garment-led development (which presents Bangladesh's export success as a model for developing countries) and the simple denunciation of the garment industry as exploitation (which ignores the genuine improvements in living standards that even this dependent form of development has produced). Instead, he situates the garment industry within the world-systems framework of global value chains, asking who captures the value created by Bangladeshi garment workers and on what terms the country's participation in the global economy is organized.

64.4 The Resource Curse and the Remittance Economy

One of the specific features of the Bangladeshi economy that Khan's political economic framework illuminates particularly well is the phenomenon that economists call the "resource curse," applied in a distinctive form to Bangladesh's situation. The classical resource curse refers to the tendency of countries with large natural resource endowments (oil, minerals) to experience slower economic growth and more authoritarian governance than countries without such endowments, because resource rents enable governments to finance themselves without taxing citizens, reducing their accountability to the population.

Bangladesh has no significant natural resource endowments of this kind, but Khan argues that its economy exhibits a structurally analogous pathology through the phenomenon of remittances: the large inflow of money sent home by Bangladeshis working abroad, primarily in the Middle East. Remittances have become one of the largest sources of foreign exchange for Bangladesh, representing a significant fraction of GDP and a major source of income for millions of rural households. They have financed consumption, supported the construction boom that has transformed Bangladeshi cities, and provided a significant cushion against the balance of payments pressures that would otherwise constrain economic policy.

But Khan's analysis points to the specific pathologies that the remittance economy generates. The migration of Bangladeshi workers to the Gulf states, under conditions of systematic exploitation and near-total vulnerability to arbitrary treatment by employers and host governments, represents a specific form of dependent integration into the global economy: the export of labor power to generate remittances that maintain the domestic consumption levels that the domestic economy cannot sustain. The governance implications are analogous to those of the resource curse: like oil revenues, remittance income reduces the pressure on the state to develop the domestic economy and to be accountable to citizens for economic management, because a

significant fraction of the population's income comes not from domestic production but from external transfers.

The specific conditions of Bangladeshi labor migration, particularly the kafala system in Gulf countries that ties workers' legal status to their employers, creates one of the most extreme forms of labor exploitation in the contemporary global economy. The vulnerability of Bangladeshi migrant workers to abuse, wage theft, and arbitrary deportation is not simply a humanitarian issue; it is a structural feature of the global labor market that Bangladesh's economic model has come to depend on in ways that make it extremely difficult to address.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE: THE GARMENT INDUSTRY AND DEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT

65.1 The Rise of the Ready-Made Garments Industry

The ready-made garments (RMG) industry is the central fact of the contemporary Bangladeshi economy, and any serious analysis of Bangladesh's development trajectory must engage with it in depth. The industry began in the late 1970s, when Korean garment manufacturers, seeking to take advantage of Bangladesh's then-unused export quotas under the Multi-Fiber Arrangement, established joint ventures with Bangladeshi partners and began training Bangladeshi workers in garment manufacturing. From these small beginnings, the industry grew to become one of the largest garment exporting industries in the world: Bangladesh is today the second-largest garment exporter globally after China, with the industry accounting for approximately 80 to 85 percent of total export earnings.

The statistics of the industry's growth are genuinely remarkable. Employment in the RMG sector has grown from almost nothing in 1980 to approximately four million workers at present, the vast majority of them women from rural backgrounds who have migrated to Dhaka and Chittagong to work in the garment factories. The industry has been credited with major improvements in the status of Bangladeshi women, as factory employment provides women with independent income, exposure to urban life and modern social norms, and a degree of economic autonomy that was largely unavailable to previous generations of rural women.

Khan's analysis of the garment industry begins with an acknowledgment of these genuine achievements, but it situates them within a much more critical assessment of the character of garment-led development and its long-term implications for Bangladesh.

65.2 Global Value Chains and the Distribution of Value

The central analytical framework that Khan applies to the garment industry is the global value chains framework, developed by economic sociologists Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon from the 1990s onward, which analyzes global industries in terms of the distribution of value added at different points in the production and distribution chain. In the case of the garment industry, the value chain extends from the production of raw materials (cotton, synthetic fibers) through

spinning and weaving, garment manufacturing, and retail to the final consumer, and the distribution of value across this chain is highly unequal.

Bangladeshi garment manufacturers occupy the manufacturing segment of this chain, which is the segment with the lowest margins and the most competitive pressure. The high-value segments of the chain, including design, branding, logistics, and retail, are controlled by the major global brands (H&M, Walmart, Inditex, Gap, and others) and their primarily Western-based logistics and retail operations. A garment that sells for fifty euros in a European store may have been manufactured in Bangladesh for a cost (including fabric, labor, and factory overhead) of five euros, with the remaining forty-five euros distributed among brand value, logistics, retail margins, and the profits of intermediaries along the chain.

This distribution of value reflects the specific power relations within the global value chain: the major brands control access to the retail markets of the wealthy countries and are therefore able to dictate terms to their suppliers, including the prices they will pay, the quality standards they require, the lead times they demand, and the flexibility they expect in terms of order volumes. Bangladeshi manufacturers, who are competing with each other and with manufacturers in other countries for a limited volume of orders, have very little bargaining power in these negotiations.

Khan's analysis uses this value chain framework to argue that the garment industry, for all its quantitative importance to the Bangladeshi economy, represents a form of dependent development that reinforces rather than overcomes Bangladesh's peripheral position in the global economy. The country provides cheap labor; the value created by that labor is primarily captured by capital in the core countries; and Bangladesh's ability to continue doing this depends on maintaining conditions of labor that are, by any measure of human dignity and social justice, deeply problematic.

65.3 The Rana Plaza Disaster and Its Structural Significance

The Rana Plaza building collapse of 24 April 2013, in which 1,134 garment workers were killed and more than 2,500 were injured when a multi-story factory building in Savar, near Dhaka, collapsed, is one of the most significant events in the recent history of the Bangladeshi garment industry, and Khan's analysis of it provides one of his most powerful illustrations of the relationship between economic structure and human welfare.

The Rana Plaza disaster was not an accident in any meaningful sense. It was the entirely predictable consequence of a set of structural incentives that the organization of the global garment value chain created. The building had known structural defects that had been reported to the building's owner; workers had been told about cracks in the building on the morning before the collapse; several businesses in the building had evacuated their employees while the garment factories continued to operate because the factory owners had been told that their orders would be cancelled if they failed to deliver. The specific conditions that produced the disaster, including inadequate building regulation, the absence of effective labor inspection, the extreme time pressure under which garment orders were processed, and the complete vulnerability of workers to employers who could fire them if they refused to work in unsafe conditions, were all direct

products of the specific character of the global garment value chain and its relationship to the Bangladeshi state.

Khan's analysis of Rana Plaza places it within his broader framework of the colonial relationship between center and periphery in the global economy. The global brands whose orders were being processed in the Rana Plaza building were aware, at some level, of the conditions under which their products were being made; the systemic character of the safety failures in Bangladeshi garment manufacturing was well documented before the Rana Plaza collapse. But the structure of global value chains created powerful incentives to ignore these conditions: the brands captured enormous value from the cheapness of Bangladeshi production, and that cheapness was possible only because of the conditions of labor that made Rana Plaza possible.

The response of the global brands to the Rana Plaza disaster, including the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety that were established in its aftermath, represents an interesting case study in the politics of corporate social responsibility that Khan analyzes with characteristic skepticism. These agreements, which committed major global brands to contribute to the costs of factory inspections and remediation, produced genuine improvements in building and fire safety in Bangladeshi garment factories. But they did not address the fundamental power asymmetry in the global value chain that had produced the disaster in the first place: they improved safety standards without changing the pricing structures and time pressures that create the incentives to violate safety standards.

65.4 Labor Rights and the Politics of the Minimum Wage

The politics of the garment workers' minimum wage in Bangladesh provides another case study in the relationship between economic structure, class power, and state policy that Khan analyzes with particular attention. The minimum wage for garment workers has been periodically set through a Minimum Wage Board process, and the negotiations around each setting have been the occasion for significant political mobilization by both workers and factory owners.

The 2023 garment workers' uprising, in which workers across the garment manufacturing districts of Dhaka went on strike demanding a wage increase from 8,000 to 23,000 taka per month, was one of the most significant labor actions in recent Bangladeshi history. The workers' demand was based on calculations of what a living wage would actually require: the cost of housing, food, transportation, and other necessities in the urban areas where garment factories are located. The factory owners' counter-offer, and the eventual minimum wage set by the Board, were far below the workers' demand, and the government's response to the strikes included the use of police force against strikers and the arrest of labor organizers.

Khan's analysis of these events situates them within his broader political economic framework in several ways. First, he notes the specific class character of the Bangladeshi state in relation to the garment industry: the state has, throughout the industry's history, prioritized the interests of factory owners (who are closely connected to the political elite) over the rights of workers, even when the formal law was on the workers' side. The refusal to enforce the minimum wage and labor rights provisions of Bangladeshi law has been a systematic feature of the state's

relationship to the garment industry, reflecting the class interests of the political and economic elite that owns the factories and finances the political parties.

Second, he analyzes the specific vulnerability of garment workers, who are primarily women migrants from rural backgrounds with no established social networks in the city, no access to land or other rural safety nets, and no ability to return home without losing their urban income. This vulnerability, which is built into the demographic character of the garment labor force, gives factory owners enormous power over workers and makes the enforcement of labor rights particularly difficult. The specific form of labor control in the garment industry, which combines the formal discipline of factory work with the informal social control that employers exercise over women workers who are away from their families and social networks, represents a specific form of the exploitation that Khan analyzes as integral to the global garment value chain.

Third, he draws attention to the connection between the garment workers' demands and the July 2024 uprising. The uprising was triggered by the quota system controversy, but its deeper roots lay in the widespread frustration with economic conditions, including the high inflation and stagnant wages that had been eroding living standards for years before the uprising. The garment workers' wages, which had not kept pace with inflation, were a specific instance of the broader economic frustration that the uprising expressed. The uprising's political character, its demand for equality, human dignity, and social justice, translates, in the specific context of the garment industry, into the demand for wages that allow workers to live in dignity, labor conditions that respect their physical safety and psychological wellbeing, and a regulatory framework that treats their rights as genuine rights rather than inconvenient obstacles to export competitiveness.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX: MICROFINANCE, SOCIAL ENTERPRISE, AND THE IDEOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT OF POVERTY

66.1 The Grameen Bank and the Global Microfinance Industry

No analysis of the Bangladeshi development experience could be complete without an extended engagement with microfinance and the Grameen Bank, which is one of the most influential development institutions of the late twentieth century and which originated in Bangladesh under the leadership of Muhammad Yunus. The Grameen Bank's model, which provides small loans to poor rural women using peer group lending mechanisms to substitute for the collateral that conventional banks require, has been replicated in more than a hundred countries and has made Muhammad Yunus one of the most globally recognized development thinkers, honored with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Khan's analysis of the Grameen Bank and the microfinance industry is one of his most contested economic positions, because it challenges what has become an almost sacrosanct development institution in Bangladesh and globally. His critique is not a simple denunciation; it is a carefully argued analysis of the specific character and limitations of the microfinance approach that draws on the available empirical evidence as well as on his broader theoretical framework.

The core of Khan's critique is that the Grameen Bank model, however genuinely innovative and beneficial in its specific context, has been systematically oversold as a general solution to poverty in ways that reflect specific ideological commitments rather than empirical evidence. The celebration of microfinance as a tool for poverty alleviation has been driven not just by evidence of its effectiveness but by its compatibility with the ideological framework of neoliberal development policy: the idea that the solution to poverty is the expansion of market access and financial inclusion rather than the redistribution of income, land, and political power.

The empirical record on microfinance's poverty-reducing effects is, Khan argues, much more ambiguous than the industry's advocates claim. The most rigorous evaluations of microfinance programs, using randomized controlled trials and other methodological innovations, have generally found that while microfinance does benefit some clients, particularly those with the entrepreneurial capacity to use borrowed capital productively, its poverty-reducing effects on the overall population are modest and far smaller than the industry's promotional literature suggests. The default rates on microfinance loans are often higher than officially reported, the interest rates charged by microfinance institutions are often very high (because the transaction costs of small loans are large relative to the amounts lent), and the debt burdens accumulated by poor families who take multiple loans from multiple institutions can become crushing.

66.2 The Social Business Paradigm and Its Limitations

Muhammad Yunus's subsequent development of the "social business" concept, which proposes a new category of enterprise organized to solve social problems without the profit motive of conventional business, is another target of Khan's critical analysis. The social business concept has been influential in development circles and in management education, and it represents Yunus's attempt to develop a general theory of economic development from the specific experience of the Grameen Bank.

Khan's critique of social business as a development paradigm draws on his broader analysis of the relationship between markets, development, and social justice. His argument is that the social business concept, while well-intentioned, fundamentally accepts the ideological framework of market capitalism by treating market mechanisms as the primary instruments of development and social improvement. The question of whether markets can solve poverty and inequality is, for Khan, not primarily a technical question about the design of business models; it is a political question about the distribution of power and the organization of social life.

The social business paradigm's implicit assumption, that poverty can be solved within the existing framework of capitalist relations of production and ownership by creating the right incentives for businesses to serve the poor rather than the wealthy, is, in Khan's analysis, a form of what he calls market fundamentalism in a social democratic guise: it replaces the neoliberal faith in unregulated markets with a faith in well-designed social businesses, but it shares neoliberalism's rejection of the political and structural changes that addressing poverty at its roots requires.

This critique of Yunus as a development thinker is of additional interest in 2024-2026 given that Yunus is now the head of Bangladesh's interim government. Khan has addressed this situation

with characteristic nuance. He separates his critique of Yunus's development ideology from his assessment of Yunus's performance as head of state. As a development economist, Yunus represents, in Khan's analysis, the ideological mainstream of the international development establishment; his microfinance and social business ideas reflect the dominant paradigm of development by market inclusion rather than redistribution. As an interim government head, Yunus is operating in a different domain, and his performance must be judged by different criteria: by his ability to manage the political transition, to create conditions for free and fair elections, and to address the immediate economic crisis.

Khan's January 2025 statement that the students who led the uprising need to form political parties to implement their programs, while broadly supportive of the post-uprising political process, also implicitly acknowledges the limitations of a technocratic interim government: the institutional forms of democratic politics, including organized political parties with programmatic commitments and bases of popular support, are necessary for the kind of sustained political engagement with structural economic questions that genuine development requires.

66.3 BRAC and the Non-Governmental Sector

Bangladesh is famous not only for the Grameen Bank but for BRAC (originally Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, now simply BRAC), which is generally recognized as the largest non-governmental organization in the world and which has pioneered a wide range of development interventions across health, education, economic development, and legal empowerment. Khan's analysis of BRAC is distinct from his analysis of microfinance, and it is worth treating separately.

Khan's assessment of BRAC is more complex and more qualified than his critique of the Grameen Bank. He acknowledges BRAC's genuine contributions to development in Bangladesh, including its community health worker program, which has significantly improved health outcomes in rural Bangladesh, its ultra-poor graduation program, which has produced demonstrably positive results for the most marginalized segment of the population, and its educational programs, which have provided schooling to millions of children who would otherwise have been excluded from formal education.

But Khan also raises important questions about the broader implications of BRAC's scale and influence for the character of Bangladeshi development. The existence of a non-governmental organization as large and as institutionally powerful as BRAC raises questions about the relationship between civil society and the state that are directly relevant to his broader analysis of democratic development. BRAC performs functions, including the provision of health care and education, that in democratic welfare states are performed by public institutions accountable to democratic governance. The substitution of a large, technically sophisticated NGO for public institutions may be efficient in the short run, but it creates a pattern of service provision that is organized around the decisions of BRAC's leadership rather than around the democratic choices of the population, and that substitutes philanthropy and social enterprise for the political struggle for a genuinely democratic welfare state.

This is not simply a theoretical concern. The development of a large NGO sector in Bangladesh, which has been partly funded by international donors who found it easier to channel development resources through NGOs than through a Bangladeshi state whose governance was perceived as corrupt and ineffective, has had the effect of creating a parallel public sector that is outside democratic accountability and that, in some cases, has served to demobilize rather than empower the poor communities it was designed to serve. The creation of a class of development professionals, many of them connected to the NGO sector, who define Bangladesh's development problems in technical terms that require technical solutions rather than in political terms that require political mobilization, is one of the specific ideological consequences of the NGO development model that Khan analyzes.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN: NEOLIBERALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN BANGLADESH

67.1 The Washington Consensus and Its Application to Bangladesh

Khan's critique of neoliberal development ideology in Bangladesh is situated within his broader analysis of the Washington Consensus: the set of policy prescriptions developed by the IMF, the World Bank, and the US Treasury in the 1980s and 1990s that was applied to developing countries seeking external financial support. The Washington Consensus policy package included trade liberalization, financial liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, deregulation, fiscal austerity, and the elimination of subsidies, organized around the fundamental premise that market mechanisms are more efficient allocators of resources than government intervention.

Bangladesh's engagement with the Washington Consensus began in earnest in the 1990s, when the restoration of electoral democracy coincided with the pressure from international financial institutions to adopt structural adjustment policies in exchange for access to development finance. The specific policies adopted in Bangladesh under this pressure included the liberalization of trade and investment, the deregulation of the financial sector, the privatization of some state enterprises, and the reduction of subsidies on food and energy. These policies had significant consequences for the character of Bangladesh's economic development that Khan analyzes with considerable precision.

The liberalization of trade and investment created the conditions under which the garment industry could develop, as it required access to imported inputs and to export markets. But it also exposed domestic agricultural production to competition from subsidized imports that domestic producers could not match, contributing to the continued stagnation of agricultural productivity and the persistence of rural poverty. The deregulation of the financial sector created conditions for a significant expansion of private banking and credit provision, but also for the accumulation of non-performing loans and the capture of the banking system by connected elites that have used credit allocation to serve their own interests rather than the developmental needs of the economy.

67.2 The IMF and the Bangladesh Economy in 2023-2025

The most recent episode in Bangladesh's relationship with the IMF, the \$4.7 billion loan program agreed in early 2023, provides a contemporary case study for Khan's analysis of the political economy of international development finance. Bangladesh sought IMF support in 2023 in response to a severe foreign exchange crisis, driven by the global commodity price shock following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (which dramatically increased Bangladesh's import costs for food, fuel, and fertilizer), the decline in garment exports during the global economic slowdown, and the inflationary pressures that were affecting living standards across the economy.

The IMF's conditions for the loan included a commitment to reduce energy subsidies, to raise interest rates to combat inflation, to reform the exchange rate by allowing the taka to depreciate to a market-determined level, to address the non-performing loan problem in the banking sector, and to strengthen fiscal discipline. These conditions, which reflect the Washington Consensus prescriptions of the 1990s updated for the specific circumstances of Bangladesh in the 2020s, are the subject of Khan's critique.

His argument is not that Bangladesh's macroeconomic imbalances did not need to be addressed: the foreign exchange crisis was real, and some adjustment was necessary. His argument is that the specific form of adjustment prescribed by the IMF, which placed the burden of adjustment primarily on the living standards of the poor (through energy subsidy reductions that raised the price of cooking fuel and transportation) rather than on the connected elite that had accumulated significant wealth through access to subsidized credit and political connections, reflected the class character of IMF conditionality. The poor bear the costs of adjustment while the wealthy are protected from accountability for the governance failures that contributed to the crisis.

This analysis connects to Khan's broader argument about the political economy of Bangladesh's fiscal system. Bangladesh has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios among comparable economies, reflecting the systematic underfunding of public services and the capture of the tax system by connected elites who use their political connections to avoid taxation. A development strategy organized around the principles of equality and social justice would begin with a fundamental reform of the tax system to ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share and that the resources are available to fund the quality public services in education, health, and social protection that Bangladesh needs. The IMF's adjustment program, which focuses on reducing expenditures rather than reforming revenues, moves in the opposite direction.

67.3 The Economic Dimensions of the July 2024 Uprising

Khan's analysis of the economic dimensions of the July 2024 uprising is one of the most important aspects of his account of that event. He is explicit in his argument that the uprising was not simply a response to the specific injustice of the quota system but an expression of the accumulated economic frustration of a generation of young people who had experienced the contradiction between the official narrative of Bangladesh's development success and the reality of their own economic prospects.

Bangladesh's official development narrative, which celebrated the country's achievement of middle-income status, its dramatic reduction in poverty rates, and its high growth rates, was a story primarily about macroeconomic aggregates that concealed a much more complex and problematic distribution of the gains from growth. The growth of the Bangladeshi economy over the past three decades, while real, had been accompanied by a significant increase in inequality: the gains from growth had accrued disproportionately to the already wealthy, while the majority of the population had experienced improvements in absolute living standards but no change or a deterioration in their relative position.

The specific economic frustrations that the uprising expressed included the unemployment and underemployment of educated youth, who had invested significantly in their own education but found that the formal economy had insufficient capacity to absorb them into decent employment; the high inflation of 2022-2024, which had eroded the purchasing power of wages and salaries; and the systematic exclusion of those without political connections from access to government services, government employment, and the economic opportunities that the state controlled.

Khan's analysis identifies these economic frustrations as the material basis for the uprising's political energy. The students who led the uprising were not simply protesting about the quota system; they were expressing a deeper frustration with a political economy that had failed to deliver on its promises of development and opportunity for the majority of the population while enriching the connected elite. Their demand for equality, human dignity, and social justice was not simply a political demand; it was a demand for an economic order organized around genuine development rather than the extraction of rents by the politically powerful.

67.4 The Post-Uprising Economic Challenge

The economic situation facing Bangladesh under the Yunus-led interim government and beyond represents one of the most serious development challenges in the country's recent history, and Khan's analysis of this situation is informed by his comprehensive political economic framework.

The immediate economic challenges are formidable. Inflation remains elevated, driven partly by the structural factors (energy import dependence, food import vulnerability) that preceded the uprising and partly by the uncertainty and disruption associated with the political transition. Foreign exchange reserves have been strained by the combination of reduced garment exports (during the disruption of the uprising period), continued pressure from import costs, and the withdrawal of some institutional investors in response to political uncertainty. The banking sector's non-performing loan problem, which had been accumulating for years under the Hasina government's politically connected lending, has not been addressed and continues to constrain the banking system's ability to support productive investment.

At a structural level, the challenges are even more fundamental. Bangladesh's heavy dependence on the garment industry for export earnings makes it extremely vulnerable to the specific dynamics of global fashion markets: shifts in consumer preferences, changes in the strategies of global brands, or the emergence of more competitive producers in other countries could rapidly undermine the foundation of the country's export economy. The climate crisis poses existential

threats to Bangladesh's agricultural sector and coastal areas, requiring massive investments in adaptation that the country's current fiscal situation cannot easily support. The young population that powered the uprising is entering a labor market that cannot provide decent employment for the numbers seeking it, creating a structural unemployment problem that threatens social stability regardless of the political resolution of the uprising's demands.

Khan's prescription for addressing these challenges is organized around his principles of equity, democratic sovereignty, and genuine human development. On equity: the tax system must be reformed to raise significantly more revenue from the wealthy, and the proceeds must be invested in quality public education, health care, and social protection that reduce inequality and expand opportunity. On democratic sovereignty: Bangladesh must assert its right to adopt industrial and development policies that serve its long-term development interests, including selective protections for developing industries and regulation of capital flows to prevent the short-term financial pressures from overriding long-term development objectives. On genuine human development: the standard of development success must shift from GDP growth to indicators of genuine human welfare, including wages, labor conditions, access to public services, environmental quality, and the distribution of income and wealth.

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT: MONEY, FINANCE, AND POWER

68.1 The Theory of Money Revisited

Khan's doctoral research on the Currency School-Banking School controversy gave him a depth of theoretical engagement with the nature of money and credit that distinguishes his economic analysis from that of most political commentators on Bangladeshi public life. This theoretical depth is not merely academic; it informs his analysis of some of the most important practical questions in Bangladeshi political economy, from the management of the banking sector to the politics of the exchange rate.

At the theoretical level, Khan's account of money draws on the Marxist tradition's analysis of money as a specific social form: a form in which social labor relations appear as relations between things. In Marx's analysis, money is not simply a technical instrument of exchange but the form in which the social character of production is mediated in a capitalist economy. The money commodity serves as the universal equivalent of value, the thing in terms of which all other commodities express their value, and this function makes money an enormous concentration of social power: whoever controls money controls the terms on which economic activity can take place.

This theoretical point, which is fundamental to the Marxist theory of capitalism, has direct political implications. The control of money, including the power to issue credit, to set interest rates, and to determine the terms on which credit is allocated, is not simply a technical matter of monetary management; it is a form of social power with profound consequences for the distribution of wealth and the organization of production. Who controls the banking system controls, in a very real sense, the direction of investment in the economy; and the direction of

investment in the economy shapes the character of development and the distribution of its benefits.

68.2 The Bangladesh Banking Sector and Its Pathologies

Khan's analysis of the Bangladeshi banking sector, which he has developed in a series of public interventions over the past decade, applies this theoretical framework to the specific institutional context of Bangladesh with devastating effect. The Bangladeshi banking sector exhibits several pathologies that he analyzes as expressions of the relationship between financial power and political power in a society organized around patron-client politics rather than democratic accountability.

The most significant pathology is the systematic allocation of credit to politically connected borrowers who lack either the intention or the capacity to repay, producing a large and growing stock of non-performing loans that impairs the banking system's ability to support productive investment. The scale of this problem, which has been documented by Bangladesh Bank's own reports and by independent analysts, reflects the degree to which the banking system has been captured by the political and economic elite that uses its political connections to access credit on favorable terms, to roll over loans that should have been declared in default, and to resist the enforcement of prudential regulations.

Khan's analysis of the banking sector pathology situates it within his broader account of the class character of the Bangladeshi state. The state's systematic failure to regulate the banking sector is not a matter of inadequate technical capacity or poor institutional design; it reflects the specific interests of the political and economic elite that controls the state and that benefits from the current system of politically connected lending. Reform of the banking sector requires not just technical changes to regulatory frameworks but a change in the political conditions that allow the elite to capture the state's regulatory functions.

The specific form that banking capture has taken under the Hasina government, including the politically motivated creation of new commercial banks for party supporters, the relaxation of prudential regulations to benefit connected borrowers, and the appointment of politically compliant bank directors and regulators, represents one of the clearest examples of the corruption of public institutions that Khan has analyzed throughout his political economic work.

68.3 The Exchange Rate and Development Policy

The politics of the exchange rate is another dimension of monetary policy that Khan's economic analysis addresses with particular attention. The debate about whether Bangladesh's taka has been systematically overvalued, and whether exchange rate depreciation would benefit or harm the Bangladeshi economy, is not simply a technical debate about optimal monetary policy; it is a debate about whose interests the exchange rate serves.

An overvalued exchange rate, which makes imports cheaper and exports more expensive, benefits importers and those who consume imported goods (primarily the urban middle class and the wealthy who consume imported luxuries) while harming exporters (primarily garment

manufacturers and, more diffusely, the export-oriented workers whose wages and employment depend on export competitiveness). The political economy of exchange rate policy in Bangladesh reflects this distributional conflict: successive governments have maintained exchange rate policies that served the interests of the urban consuming class at the expense of export competitiveness, and the pressures toward depreciation that have periodically emerged have been managed in ways that protect the interests of the connected elite.

Khan connects the exchange rate debate to his analysis of the IMF's role in Bangladesh's economic policy. The IMF's pressure for exchange rate depreciation as part of its 2023 loan conditions reflects its general market-oriented framework: a flexible, market-determined exchange rate is, from the IMF's perspective, a more efficient mechanism than managed rates. Khan's assessment is more nuanced: he acknowledges the efficiency arguments for more flexible exchange rate management, but he insists that the specific form of depreciation demanded by the IMF, which placed the burden of adjustment on the poor through higher import prices, was not the only possible approach to addressing Bangladesh's external imbalance.

68.4 Islamic Finance and the Banking System

One of the specific features of the Bangladeshi financial system that is of particular interest from the perspective of Khan's analysis is the significant and growing presence of Islamic finance: banking and financial services organized around the principles of Sharia law, which prohibits the charging of interest on loans.

Islamic banking in Bangladesh has grown significantly over the past three decades, and Islamic banks now account for a substantial fraction of the total banking sector. The growth of Islamic banking reflects both the demand from religiously conservative depositors and borrowers who prefer financial products that comply with Islamic law, and the specific political dynamics that have favored the development of Islamic financial institutions.

Khan's analysis of Islamic banking is characteristically double-edged. He is interested in the genuine intellectual and ethical tradition of Islamic economics, which has developed important critiques of the interest-based financial system from a perspective that draws on religious ethics rather than secular economics. The Islamic prohibition on *riba* (interest) reflects a genuine moral insight about the exploitative potential of creditor-debtor relationships, and the Islamic financial tradition's emphasis on risk-sharing and profit-sharing arrangements as alternatives to fixed-interest lending represents an interesting and potentially productive approach to the design of financial institutions.

But he is also critical of the specific forms that Islamic banking has taken in Bangladesh, which often represent a substitution of Islamic labels for conventional financial products rather than genuine implementation of the profit-sharing principles that the Islamic finance tradition is supposed to embody. The *murabaha* financing structure, for example, which is the most common product of Islamic banks, involves the bank purchasing goods and reselling them to the customer at a markup that is economically equivalent to an interest rate; the distinction from conventional lending is formal rather than substantive. The capture of Islamic banking institutions by the same

politically connected elite that has captured conventional banking produces the same pathologies in a different institutional form.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE: AGRARIAN QUESTION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

69.1 The Persistence of the Agrarian Question

The agrarian question, the question of the organization of agricultural production and its relationship to broader patterns of economic development and social structure, has been one of the central concerns of development economics and Marxist political economy since the nineteenth century. In the context of Bangladesh, which despite its rapid urbanization remains a society in which agriculture plays a major role in both economic production and the livelihood of a large fraction of the population, the agrarian question retains a significance that much of the mainstream development literature on Bangladesh tends to underestimate.

Khan's engagement with the agrarian question in Bangladesh is situated within the tradition of Marxist agrarian political economy that runs from Marx's own engagement with the question of the transition from feudal to capitalist agriculture through Lenin's analysis of the differentiation of the Russian peasantry to the contemporary scholarship on agrarian change in developing countries. His analysis draws on this tradition while engaging with the specific historical and institutional character of Bangladeshi agrarian life.

The specific features of Bangladeshi agrarian structure that Khan's analysis emphasizes include the extreme fragmentation of landholdings (the result of population growth and the subdivision of plots over generations), the prevalence of sharecropping and other forms of non-market labor arrangements, the role of NGO credit (particularly microfinance) and government subsidized inputs in mediating smallholder farmers' relationship to markets, and the growing significance of non-farm income sources (including remittances and garment employment) in the livelihood strategies of rural households.

69.2 Land Reform and the Persistence of Inequality

The question of land reform, of the redistribution of agricultural land as a means of addressing rural poverty and inequality, is one of the most politically charged questions in Bangladeshi development politics, and Khan's position on it is one of the clearest expressions of his commitment to the principles of equality and social justice.

The history of land reform in Bangladesh is a history of progressive aspirations and political failures. The zamindari abolition of 1950 in East Pakistan, which eliminated the landlord class created by the Permanent Settlement and transferred ownership to the actual cultivators, was a genuine improvement in the condition of the peasantry. But subsequent attempts at more fundamental land reform, including the land ceiling legislation that limited the amount of land any individual family could own, were largely ineffective due to the political power of large landowners who used a variety of legal and illegal mechanisms to evade the ceilings.

The result is a continuing pattern of significant inequality in land ownership in Bangladesh, despite the formal equality of the legal system. A significant fraction of the rural population is landless or near-landless, lacking the most basic productive resource and therefore dependent on wage labor, sharecropping, or non-agricultural income for their livelihoods. This landlessness is not simply a poverty statistic; it is a form of social subordination that makes the landless rural poor extremely vulnerable to exploitation by those who own land and by those who control access to credit, agricultural inputs, and markets.

Khan's prescription for addressing this situation draws on the longstanding progressive tradition of land reform, but it is qualified by his awareness of the political obstacles that have always frustrated land reform programs. He recognizes that genuine land redistribution would require challenging the political power of the landed elite, which has consistently been able to protect its interests against reform efforts. The political conditions for genuine land reform in Bangladesh do not currently exist; creating those conditions requires the kind of sustained democratic mobilization and political organization that Khan identifies as the primary task of progressive politics.

69.3 Climate Change and the Future of Bangladeshi Agriculture

No analysis of Bangladesh's agrarian situation can be complete without addressing the climate crisis, which poses existential threats to the agricultural economy and the livelihoods of the rural poor that dwarf all other development challenges in their scale and urgency. Bangladesh is consistently identified as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change: its low-lying coastal geography, its dependence on seasonal rainfall and river flows that are being disrupted by climate change, and its dense population in flood-prone river basins make it extraordinarily exposed to the consequences of rising sea levels, more intense cyclones, disrupted monsoons, and changing river flow patterns.

Khan's analysis of the climate crisis and its implications for Bangladesh is situated within his broader anti-colonial framework in a way that illuminates a dimension of the climate question that much of the mainstream climate discourse tends to avoid. The climate crisis is not a natural disaster; it is the product of specific choices about how to organize energy production and economic activity that were made primarily by the wealthy countries over the past two centuries. The industrialization of Europe and North America, powered by fossil fuels, has produced the greenhouse gas concentrations that are now causing the climate disruption that Bangladesh and other low-income tropical countries are experiencing most severely. In this specific sense, the climate crisis is a form of the drain of wealth analyzed by Naoroji and Bose: wealth produced by burning carbon in the North creates poverty and displacement in the South.

The implication of this analysis, which Khan has expressed in his public interventions on the climate issue, is that the responsibility for financing climate adaptation in Bangladesh should rest primarily with the high-income countries that have caused the problem, not with Bangladesh itself. The insistence of international negotiations that developing countries should reduce their own carbon emissions without providing adequate compensation for the development paths they are being asked to forego, and without providing adequate finance for adaptation to the climate

impacts that developed country emissions have already made inevitable, is a form of neocolonial injustice that Khan places within his broader critique of the global economic order.

CHAPTER SEVENTY: POSTCOLONIAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND ITS CRITICS

70.1 The Challenge of Post-Development Theory

The tradition of post-development theory, associated with thinkers like Arturo Escobar, Wolfgang Sachs, and Gustavo Esteva, represents a radical challenge to the entire framework of development economics that Khan must engage with seriously, because it raises questions that his own anti-colonial perspective makes him sympathetic to, even if his ultimate assessment of the post-development position is critical.

Post-development theory argues that "development" is not a universal process of improvement toward a standard of welfare defined by the experience of the rich countries, but a specific discourse of power that was produced in the context of Cold War geopolitics and that has served to legitimate the subordination of non-Western societies to Western economic and political priorities. In Escobar's analysis, the "development" apparatus that emerged after World War II, including the World Bank, the IMF, bilateral aid programs, and the academic discipline of development economics, did not simply address pre-existing poverty and underdevelopment; it produced "underdevelopment" as a category that made Third World societies legible to Western intervention and management.

This analysis resonates with several aspects of Khan's own critique of mainstream development ideology: the recognition that development discourse carries ideological freight, the awareness that the standard of development is defined in ways that serve Western interests, and the insistence on the importance of local knowledge and local agency in defining what development means and what it requires. The parallel with Said's *Orientalism*, which Khan deploys throughout his work, is obvious: just as *Orientalism* produced the Orient as an object of Western knowledge and power, post-development theory argues that "development" produced the Third World as an object of Western intervention and management.

But Khan's engagement with post-development theory is critical as well as sympathetic. His primary objection is that post-development theory, in its rejection of the development project as such, tends toward a romanticism about pre-development conditions that ignores the genuine suffering of poverty, the genuine desire of poor people for better living conditions, and the genuine importance of economic growth (however distributed) for improving human welfare. The dismissal of development in favor of an idealized vision of local community life before the "invention of development" ignores the feudal structures, the patriarchal hierarchies, and the material deprivations that characterized pre-development societies.

Khan's response to this problem is to insist on the distinction between development as a goal (the genuine improvement of human welfare) and development as an ideology (the specific set of

power relations and discursive practices that post-development theory criticizes). The former is genuinely valuable and must be defended; the latter is rightly criticized. The task of progressive development theory is to recover the genuine goal of development from the ideological apparatus that has captured it, and to articulate an alternative development vision that is organized around the interests and agency of the poor rather than around the expansion of global capital.

70.2 Amartya Sen and the Capabilities Approach

Amartya Sen's capabilities approach to development, developed in a series of works from *Poverty and Famines* (1981) through *Development as Freedom* (1999) and beyond, represents one of the most important intellectual interventions in development theory of the past half-century, and Khan's engagement with it is extensive and nuanced.

Sen's core argument is that development should be understood as the expansion of human capabilities: the real freedoms that people have to live lives they have reason to value. Poverty is, on this view, not simply a matter of inadequate income but of capability deprivation: the absence of the basic freedoms necessary for human agency and self-expression. And development is not simply economic growth but the expansion of these capabilities: better health, better education, political freedom, social participation, and material security.

Khan's engagement with Sen begins with an appreciation of the capabilities approach's challenge to the reductionism of mainstream development economics, which measures development primarily in terms of GDP growth and market integration. Sen's insistence that the ends of development are constituted by the expansion of human freedom rather than by the expansion of production is, in Khan's view, an important corrective to the technocratic development ideology that treats GDP growth as the ultimate measure of progress. The capabilities approach's attention to the distribution of welfare, not just its aggregate level, is also congruent with Khan's insistence on the principles of equality and social justice.

But Khan has important critical reservations about the capabilities approach that distinguish his position from Sen's. His primary criticism is that the capabilities approach, while it identifies the content of development in a way that is more adequate than GDP growth, is insufficiently attentive to the political and structural conditions that produce capability deprivation. Sen's framework tends to analyze poverty and underdevelopment in terms of individual capabilities and their absence, without adequate attention to the class structures, property relations, and power dynamics that systematically produce capability deprivation for some people while enabling capability expansion for others.

The connection between Sen's capabilities approach and its famous application to the analysis of the Bengal Famine of 1943 is instructive here. Sen's analysis of the famine, which showed that it resulted from a failure of entitlements rather than a failure of food supply, was a major intellectual advance. But Khan's extension of this analysis, which situates the entitlement failure within the specific political economy of colonial rule and the class structure of colonial Bengali society, provides a more complete account of why the famine occurred and what conditions would need to change to prevent future famines. The capabilities approach's individualistic framework tends to treat entitlement failures as the product of market failures that can be

addressed by improving market access; Khan's political economic framework identifies them as the product of class structures that require political transformation to address.

70.3 Ha-Joon Chang and the Kicking Away the Ladder

Among contemporary heterodox development economists, Ha-Joon Chang is one whose work Khan has engaged with most productively. Chang's analysis of the history of economic development, particularly his argument in *Kicking Away the Ladder* (2002) that the development strategies currently prescribed for developing countries by international financial institutions are fundamentally different from those that the now-developed countries used during their own periods of industrialization, resonates with Khan's anti-colonial framework in several important ways.

Chang's core argument is that virtually every now-developed country used active industrial policy, protectionism, and state intervention during its period of catch-up industrialization, and that the Washington Consensus demand that developing countries adopt free trade and market-oriented policies represents a form of "kicking away the ladder": having climbed to prosperity using policies of active government intervention, the developed countries pull the ladder up behind them by insisting that developing countries adopt the opposite policies. This is exactly the kind of historical argument that Khan finds most compelling: it uses the evidence of history to challenge the ideological claim that free markets are the universal road to development.

The implications for Bangladesh are significant. The development of South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, the "East Asian miracles" that represent the most successful examples of catch-up industrialization in the post-war period, all involved extensive state intervention: industrial policy that directed investment toward prioritized sectors, protectionism that allowed infant industries to develop without being destroyed by foreign competition, and state direction of the financial system to channel credit toward development priorities rather than simply the highest financial returns. The claim that Bangladesh should follow the free-market model rather than the East Asian developmental state model is, in Chang's analysis and Khan's appropriation of it, not a claim about the most effective path to development; it is a claim about the maintenance of the global economic hierarchy in which the current developed countries occupy the top positions.

70.4 The Developmental State and Its Prospects in Bangladesh

The concept of the developmental state, developed from the analysis of East Asian industrialization by scholars including Chalmers Johnson (who coined the term in his analysis of MITI and Japan's postwar development), Peter Evans, and Alice Amsden, describes a form of state that is actively engaged in directing the economic development of its society toward long-term industrialization goals, rather than simply providing the institutional framework for market transactions.

Khan's assessment of the developmental state model's relevance to Bangladesh is one of the most practically important aspects of his economic analysis, because it addresses directly the question of what the Bangladeshi state should do to promote genuine economic development rather than simply to maintain the conditions for market activity.

His argument is that Bangladesh needs a developmental state: an active state that identifies strategic development priorities, directs investment toward those priorities through credit allocation, tax policy, and direct investment, protects and nurtures developing industries until they are competitive on world markets, and invests heavily in the human capital, infrastructure, and institutional development that long-term development requires. This is a very different model from the minimalist state of neoliberal prescription, and it requires a very different kind of state capacity and political organization.

The challenge, which Khan acknowledges with characteristic honesty, is that the conditions for a successful developmental state in Bangladesh are not currently in place. The developmental states of East Asia were characterized by a specific form of state capacity: a competent, relatively insulated bureaucracy with the technical ability and the political space to make long-term strategic decisions without being captured by short-term private interests. This state capacity was itself the product of specific historical conditions, including the land reforms that broke the power of the landed elite in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, and the Cold War geopolitics that gave these states access to US markets and technology while protecting their own markets.

Bangladesh's state, by contrast, has been characterized by the kind of patrimonial politics that Khan analyzes throughout his work: a state captured by private interests, organized around patron-client relationships rather than developmental objectives, and systematically unable to insulate its regulatory and developmental functions from the pressures of connected elites. Building the kind of developmental state capacity that Bangladesh needs requires, in Khan's analysis, the same kind of democratic political transformation that his analysis of communalism, educational policy, and language politics points toward: not a technical reform of state institutions but a political transformation that changes the class composition of political power and the character of the interests that the state serves.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE: ECONOMICS, JUSTICE, AND THE PROBLEM OF GROWTH

71.1 Growth, Distribution, and the Measurement Problem

One of the most fundamental questions in development economics, and one that Khan addresses in various ways throughout his economic writing, is the question of what we should be measuring when we measure development. The dominance of GDP growth as the primary metric of economic success in both academic economics and public policy discourse reflects a specific choice about what development means, a choice that Khan argues is both analytically inadequate and politically loaded.

The limitations of GDP as a welfare measure are by now well understood, and Khan draws on the extensive literature documenting those limitations. GDP measures the total monetary value of economic activity in a country, but it does not distinguish between activities that improve human welfare and activities that are merely economically active. It counts the cost of cleaning up

pollution as part of GDP but does not subtract the welfare loss from the pollution itself. It counts the economic activity generated by crime and its prevention but does not subtract the suffering that crime causes. It rises when a natural resource is extracted but does not account for the depletion of the resource stock. And most importantly for Khan's purposes, it measures aggregate economic activity without any account of how the product of that activity is distributed.

A country can show high GDP growth while the majority of its population experiences stagnant or declining living standards, if the growth is concentrated among the wealthy. Bangladesh's development record over the past three decades illustrates this point: the country has achieved genuinely high growth rates by conventional measures, and absolute poverty has declined significantly. But income inequality has also increased significantly, the distribution of the gains from growth has been highly unequal, and for large fractions of the population the experience of development has been one of modest material improvement alongside a felt sense of being left behind in a society where the wealthy are visibly getting much wealthier.

Khan's prescription is that development policy must be evaluated not just by aggregate growth measures but by distributional measures: by how the gains from growth are distributed across the population, by whether the growth is reducing inequality or increasing it, and by whether the most marginalized groups are experiencing genuine improvements in their substantive welfare. This prescription connects directly to the capabilities approach that Sen has developed, though Khan's version of it is more explicitly attentive to the political and structural conditions that determine distribution.

71.2 Thomas Piketty and Global Inequality

The publication of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* in 2013 (English translation 2014) opened a major new chapter in the academic and public debate about inequality and capital in contemporary capitalism, and Khan's engagement with Piketty's analysis is one of the places where his economic thought intersects most directly with contemporary global economic debates.

Piketty's core empirical finding, based on an unprecedented historical database of income and wealth distribution, is that inequality in the major capitalist economies has been increasing for the past four decades, reversing the trend toward greater equality that characterized the post-war period. His theoretical explanation for this trend, summarized in the formula $r > g$ (the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of economic growth, so capital owners accumulate wealth faster than the economy grows, increasing inequality over time), provides a systematic account of why capital accumulation tends toward increasing concentration absent specific political interventions.

Khan engages with Piketty's analysis appreciatively but critically. He appreciates the empirical contribution, which provides powerful documentation of the trends toward inequality that his political economic framework leads him to expect. He also appreciates the theoretical framework, which uses a simplified version of classical political economy to show why market capitalism left to itself tends toward increasing concentration of wealth rather than toward the equality that neoclassical economics tends to assume.

His critical reservations are of two kinds. First, he argues that Piketty's framework, while valuable, is insufficiently attentive to the specifically colonial and postcolonial dimensions of global inequality. Piketty's data and analysis focus primarily on the now-developed countries, and his analysis of the global dimension of inequality, while present in his later work *Capital and Ideology* (2019), does not fully integrate the colonial history of the drain of wealth from the Global South into his account of how the Global North accumulated the capital that now generates the returns that are driving increasing inequality. The inequalities between countries, which are much larger than the inequalities within countries that Piketty analyzes, are a direct product of the colonial history that Khan has analyzed throughout his work.

Second, he argues that Piketty's proposed solution, a global wealth tax, while intellectually interesting, is politically naïve in a way that reflects the limits of economic analysis divorced from political analysis. The question of how to implement a global wealth tax requires confronting directly the political power of the wealthy, who have both the resources and the political connections to resist such a tax in any jurisdiction that attempts to impose it. Khan's political economic analysis insists that addressing inequality requires not just the right policy design but the transformation of the political conditions that allow the wealthy to capture the political system and protect their interests from redistribution.

71.3 Degrowth and the Future of Development

The degrowth movement, which has become an increasingly significant current in ecological economics and political economy since the 2010s, raises questions that have fundamental implications for any serious development theory, including Khan's, and he has begun to engage with these questions in his more recent work.

The degrowth argument, associated with thinkers like Serge Latouche, Jason Hickel, and Kate Raworth, is that the ecological limits of the planet make indefinite economic growth impossible, and that the pursuit of growth in the wealthy countries is destroying the ecological foundations of human life on the planet. The solution, in the degrowth framework, is a planned reduction of economic throughput in the wealthy countries, moving toward an economy that operates within ecological limits while maintaining or improving human welfare by shifting from the production of material goods to the provision of services and to genuinely valued activities that do not require high material throughput.

Khan's engagement with the degrowth argument is sympathetic in its diagnosis of the ecological problem but skeptical about the implications for developing countries. His point is that the degrowth argument, as typically formulated by thinkers in wealthy countries, faces a fundamental problem of global justice: it argues for the reduction of economic growth at a moment when billions of people in the Global South have not yet achieved the basic material welfare that the wealthy countries take for granted. A development theory that tells the people of Bangladesh, whose per capita income is a tiny fraction of the average income in wealthy countries, that they should not pursue economic growth for ecological reasons is asking them to sacrifice their development for problems caused primarily by the wealthy countries.

Khan's preferred framework for addressing the ecological dimension of development insists on the distinction between the responsibilities of wealthy and poor countries. The wealthy countries, which have historically been responsible for the overwhelming majority of greenhouse gas emissions and which continue to consume at levels that are ecologically unsustainable, have both the capability and the responsibility to reduce their material throughput. The poor countries, which need economic growth to meet the basic needs of their populations and which have contributed far less to the ecological problems, have the right to pursue development. Global justice in the ecological domain requires the wealthy countries to reduce their consumption to make ecological space available for the development of the poor countries, rather than asking both to reduce simultaneously.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO: CAPITAL, LABOR, AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION

72.1 Marx's Capital and Its Relevance to Bangladesh

Khan's engagement with Marx's *Capital* is a sustained intellectual relationship that runs through his entire career and that constitutes one of the most distinctive aspects of his intellectual formation. Unlike many intellectuals who draw on Marx primarily through secondary sources or through the mediation of specific Marxist traditions, Khan has engaged directly with the text of *Capital*, read it carefully, and thought through its implications for the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political economy with a seriousness that distinguishes his economic analysis.

Capital's fundamental contribution, in Khan's reading, is the analysis of the specifically capitalist form of the exploitation of labor: the way in which the extraction of surplus value from workers is mediated through the market form, appearing as a fair exchange between capital and labor, when in fact it involves the appropriation of the difference between the value workers produce and the value they receive as wages. This form of exploitation is, in Marx's analysis, both mystified (hidden behind the apparently equal exchange of the labor market) and universal (applying to all workers who sell their labor power to capital, regardless of their specific occupation or industry).

The application of this analysis to Bangladesh illuminates the specific character of the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers in the garment industry, the construction sector, and the informal economy in ways that mainstream development economics, with its focus on market efficiency and comparative advantage, cannot. The garment worker who produces garments that sell for fifty euros is not fairly compensated by the five euros of manufacturing costs that accrue in Bangladesh; the difference is surplus value that is appropriated by capital further up the global value chain. This appropriation is not a market failure; it is the normal operation of capitalism, and addressing it requires not just better regulation of individual markets but a transformation of the power relations that determine the distribution of value in global production.

72.2 The Informal Economy and Primitive Accumulation

One of the most important features of the Bangladeshi economy that Khan's Marxist framework illuminates is the enormous informal sector: the vast economy of petty trade, small-scale manufacturing, domestic service, and day labor that exists outside the formal regulatory framework and that provides livelihoods for a large fraction of the urban population.

The informal economy is typically analyzed in mainstream development economics as a transitional phenomenon: a sector that exists because workers lack the skills or capital to participate in the formal economy, and that will progressively shrink as development proceeds and more workers are absorbed into formal employment. Khan's analysis challenges this account by situating the informal economy within the broader dynamics of capitalist development rather than treating it as a residual of pre-capitalist economic organization.

His argument, drawing on the concept of primitive accumulation that Marx developed in the historical chapters of *Capital*, is that the informal economy in Bangladesh is not simply a pre-capitalist residual waiting to be absorbed into formal capitalism; it is a product of capitalist development itself. The same process of capitalist development that has created the garment factories and the construction industry has also produced the pool of displaced and dispossessed workers who make up the informal economy, by dissolving the traditional agricultural and craft economies that previously provided their livelihoods without yet providing formal employment opportunities for all of them.

The informal economy is therefore not outside capitalism but integral to it: it provides the reserve army of labor that keeps wages in the formal sector under pressure, it provides the low-cost services (petty trade, domestic service, repair and maintenance) that enable the formal economy to function with lower wage costs than would otherwise be possible, and it absorbs the social costs (unemployment, poverty, insecurity) of capitalist development in ways that are invisible to formal economic accounting.

72.3 Women, Labor, and the Feminist Political Economy

Khan's economic analysis engages seriously with the feminist political economy tradition in ways that are worth highlighting specifically, because the gender dimensions of the Bangladeshi economy are among its most important and most contested features.

The garment industry, as we have noted, is distinguished by its overwhelmingly female labor force: approximately 80 percent of garment workers are women, most of them young women who have migrated from rural areas to work in the factories. The dominant narrative about female garment employment in the development literature treats it as straightforwardly empowering: women who work in factories have independent incomes, exposure to urban modernity, and a degree of economic autonomy that their mothers and grandmothers in rural Bangladesh did not have.

Khan's analysis of this narrative draws on the feminist political economy tradition, particularly the work of Diane Elson on women and structural adjustment and of Naila Kabeer on labor standards and gender in Bangladesh, to develop a more complex account. He acknowledges the genuine empowerment effects of independent employment for many women, and he does not

romanticize the conditions of rural women's lives that preceded industrial employment. But he insists on maintaining awareness of the specific forms of exploitation and control to which female garment workers are subjected: the sexual harassment in factories, the denial of maternity leave and other reproductive rights, the social surveillance by male family members who sometimes appropriate women's wages, and the specific vulnerability to dismissal that pregnancy creates.

More broadly, Khan situates the feminization of the garment labor force within the global political economy of cheap labor production. The predominance of women in the garment labor force is not accidental; it is the product of specific social arrangements that make women's labor cheaper and more controllable than men's labor. The combination of patriarchal norms that limit women's bargaining power, the social pressure on women to accept lower wages in exchange for the dignity of formal employment, and the specific vulnerabilities of women who are away from their family networks in the city creates the conditions for a form of labor exploitation that is specifically gendered.

The feminist political economy framework thus connects to Khan's broader analysis of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy: the specific forms that capitalist exploitation takes are shaped by the patriarchal social arrangements that capitalism inhabits and reproduces, and addressing the exploitation of Bangladeshi women workers requires challenging both the capitalist structures of the global garment value chain and the patriarchal social norms that make women's labor particularly cheap and tractable.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE: ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY AND DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

73.1 The Right to Development

The right to development, enshrined in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, is a concept that Khan mobilizes in his analysis of the global political economy of development. The Declaration asserts that every human being and every people has the inalienable right to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development, and that the right to development implies full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination.

Khan's appropriation of the right to development connects it to his anti-colonial framework by emphasizing the dimension of self-determination: the right of peoples to define their own development priorities, to choose their own development strategies, and to organize their economic life in accordance with their own values and interests rather than in conformity with development models imposed by external actors. This is the economic dimension of the anti-colonialism that runs through his entire intellectual project: the insistence that economic sovereignty is as important as political sovereignty, and that genuine independence requires not just the formal right to make political decisions but the substantive capacity to make economic choices that serve the interests of the majority of the population.

The practical implications of this principle are significant. Economic sovereignty in the contemporary global economy requires the right to maintain selective protection of developing industries, the right to regulate capital flows to prevent financial instability and maintain macroeconomic space for development policy, the right to use state enterprises and development finance institutions to direct investment toward developmental priorities, and the right to negotiate trade agreements on terms that serve national development interests rather than the interests of the most powerful global actors.

All of these rights have been constrained by the conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions and by the provisions of trade agreements that developing countries have been pressured to sign. Khan's critique of this constraint is both a critique of specific institutions and policies and a principled assertion of the right of developing countries to pursue their own development paths on their own terms.

73.2 South-South Cooperation and New Development Finance

The emergence of China as a major provider of development finance and economic partnership for developing countries, including Bangladesh, has created new possibilities and new challenges for the development strategies that Khan advocates. His analysis of China's economic engagement with Bangladesh is nuanced, refusing both the uncritical celebration of Chinese investment as an alternative to Western neocolonialism and the paranoid demonization of Chinese engagement as a debt trap or a new form of imperialism.

Khan's framework for assessing China's economic engagement with Bangladesh draws on his broader analysis of the conditions that make external economic relationships beneficial or harmful. The key question is not who provides the finance or what country the investment comes from, but on what terms the engagement occurs and in whose interests it is organized. Chinese development finance that is provided on genuinely concessional terms, for infrastructure projects that serve Bangladesh's development priorities, with adequate transparency and reasonable conditionalities, is potentially beneficial regardless of its source. Chinese investment that is primarily aimed at capturing Bangladeshi resources or markets for Chinese interests, on terms that are opaque or that create unsustainable debt obligations, is problematic regardless of the ideological framing in which it is presented.

Khan's broader argument about South-South cooperation draws on the tradition of Bandung non-alignment, the 1955 conference of Asian and African nations that articulated the principle of solidarity among the newly independent nations of the Global South and the right to development on their own terms. The Bandung tradition resonates with several dimensions of Khan's anti-colonial framework: its insistence on sovereign equality, its rejection of the Cold War binary that required developing nations to align with either the US or Soviet blocs, and its vision of a world order organized around cooperation among equals rather than the dominance of powerful states.

73.3 Khan's Vision for Bangladeshi Development

Khan's positive vision for Bangladesh's economic development, which emerges from his critical engagement with both mainstream and heterodox development economics, is organized around several interconnected principles.

The first principle is democratic public investment: the use of public resources, financed through a progressive and effective tax system, to provide quality public services in education, health care, and social protection, to invest in the infrastructure (transport, energy, digital connectivity) that productive private investment requires, and to support the development of new industries through patient capital and industrial policy. This vision draws on the tradition of the developmental state, but it insists on the democratic accountability of public investment decisions rather than their insulation in a technocratic state bureaucracy.

The second principle is industrial diversification: the deliberate development of a more diversified economic structure that reduces Bangladesh's catastrophic dependence on the single export sector of garment manufacturing. This diversification must be achieved through active industrial policy that identifies sectors where Bangladesh can develop competitive advantage through a combination of natural endowments, labor skills, and strategic government support, and provides the protection and support necessary for new industries to develop. The sectors that Khan identifies as most promising for diversification include light engineering and electronics (building on skills developed in the garment industry), pharmaceuticals (where Bangladesh already has a significant generic drug industry with export potential), information technology (where the young, educated population represents an underutilized asset), and agro-processing (which could add value to agricultural production and reduce post-harvest losses).

The third principle is labor rights and wages: the enforcement of genuine labor rights and the establishment of wages that allow workers to live in dignity. This is both a justice issue and a development strategy: the suppression of wages in the name of export competitiveness may support short-term growth metrics but it undermines the domestic demand that could power a more sustainable and more equitable form of development. A Bangladesh in which garment workers earn a living wage is a Bangladesh with a larger domestic market for goods and services, a more stable social foundation for democratic governance, and a better basis for the development of human capital that long-term development requires.

The fourth principle is genuine rural development: investment in the productive capacity of the agricultural sector, including irrigation infrastructure, agricultural research, extension services, and storage and processing facilities that reduce post-harvest losses, combined with measures to address the structural inequalities of land tenure that have historically prevented smallholder farmers from benefiting fully from agricultural improvement.

The fifth principle is climate resilience: massive investment in the adaptation measures that Bangladesh's specific geographic vulnerability to climate change requires, including coastal embankments and drainage systems, cyclone-resistant housing, salinity-tolerant crop varieties, and the managed relocation of the most vulnerable coastal communities. This investment must be financed primarily by the wealthy countries that have caused the climate crisis, through the mechanisms of climate finance that international agreements have established, and Bangladesh must be assertive in claiming the finance to which it is entitled.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE JULY 2024 UPRISING AND AFTER

74.1 The Economic Roots of Political Transformation

Khan's analysis of the political economy of the July 2024 uprising, which we have touched on in earlier chapters of this part, deserves extended treatment here in the context of his development economic framework. His argument is that the uprising cannot be understood without understanding its economic roots: the specific economic conditions that produced the frustration that the uprising expressed and the specific economic interests that determined who participated in it and what they wanted from it.

The economic background to the uprising includes several specific factors that Khan's analysis identifies. The first is the high inflation of 2022-2024, which eroded the purchasing power of wages and salaries at a time when the Bangladeshi economy was already experiencing the effects of the global commodity price shock. For urban wage earners, particularly the students and young professionals who led the uprising, this inflation meant a significant deterioration in their material conditions precisely at the moment when they had expected their educational investments to begin paying off in the form of decent employment and improving living standards.

The second factor is the unemployment and underemployment of educated youth. Bangladesh has expanded its higher education system dramatically over the past two decades, producing graduates in numbers that far exceed the formal economy's capacity to absorb them into employment appropriate to their qualifications. The surplus of educated graduates relative to available formal employment opportunities creates a specific form of economic frustration: the frustration of people who have made significant sacrifices to obtain qualifications and who find that those qualifications do not translate into the economic security and social mobility they were promised.

The quota system controversy that triggered the uprising is directly related to this economic frustration. The quota system, which reserved a significant fraction of civil service jobs for specific categories including descendants of Liberation War fighters, was experienced by the student protesters not simply as an injustice in principle but as a specific economic deprivation: the reduction of their access to the civil service, which is one of the most sought-after forms of employment in Bangladesh precisely because of its security, benefits, and social prestige.

Khan's analysis refuses the temptation to reduce the uprising to its immediate economic triggers, but he insists on maintaining the connection between the political demands of the uprising and their economic foundations. The demand for equality, which was the uprising's most fundamental political claim, is at once a political demand for equal treatment before the law and an economic demand for equal access to the opportunities and resources that the state controls. The demand for human dignity is at once a political claim for recognition of the full humanity of every citizen and an economic claim for the conditions of material life that dignity requires. The

demand for social justice is at once a political claim for an accountable democratic governance and an economic claim for the redistribution of the gains from development to those who have been left behind.

74.2 Economic Policy Under the Yunus Government

Khan's assessment of the Yunus interim government's economic policy, expressed in a series of public interventions in 2024 and 2025, reflects his characteristic combination of strategic support and critical analysis.

He acknowledges the genuine difficulties of the economic situation that the Yunus government inherited: the foreign exchange pressures, the inflation legacy, the banking sector's non-performing loan problem, and the need to maintain investor confidence and the flow of garment orders during a period of political uncertainty. He also acknowledges the specific constraints on the interim government's ability to pursue fundamental economic reforms: its limited mandate, its dependence on international financial support (which comes with conditions), and the need to maintain political stability during the transition.

But he is also critical of specific economic policy choices that he sees as reflecting the neoliberal development ideology that Yunus himself represents. The approach to the banking sector, which has focused on regulatory enforcement and the recovery of non-performing loans without challenging the underlying political economy of connected lending, is likely to be insufficient to address the structural problem. The approach to the IMF loan conditions, which has involved compliance with the Fund's demands for fiscal adjustment and subsidy reduction, places the burden of adjustment on the poor in ways that contradict the uprising's demands for equality and social justice. And the government's engagement with international investors, which emphasizes Bangladesh's attractiveness as a destination for export-oriented manufacturing, perpetuates the dependent development model rather than charting a new economic course.

Khan's prescription for a more genuinely transformative economic policy under the interim government and its successor would include immediate measures to protect the most vulnerable from the effects of economic adjustment, including the restoration of food subsidies and targeted social protection transfers; medium-term reforms of the tax system to raise more revenue from the wealthy; reform of the banking sector that includes genuine accountability for those responsible for the non-performing loan crisis; and a commitment to the kind of industrial policy and diversification strategy that could reduce Bangladesh's dependence on the garment sector in the longer term.

74.3 The Class Question and the Future of Bangladeshi Development

The most fundamental question in Khan's political economy, and the one that connects all the specific analyses we have examined in this part to his broader philosophical and political framework, is the class question: the question of who benefits from economic development and whose interests determine economic policy.

Khan's analysis has consistently identified a pattern in which the gains from Bangladeshi economic development have accrued disproportionately to the connected elite, while the costs of economic adjustment and the risks of economic instability have been borne primarily by the poor and the working class. This pattern is not the result of market processes that distribute rewards according to contribution; it is the result of political power that allows connected elites to capture both the state's regulatory functions and the opportunities created by development for their own benefit.

Changing this pattern requires changing the political conditions that produce it: the organization of democratic forces that are committed to a development strategy organized around the interests of the majority rather than the minority, the building of political parties and social movements capable of translating the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice into concrete economic policies, and the creation of the institutional conditions, including genuine rule of law, effective regulation, and democratic accountability, that prevent elite capture of the state and its resources.

This is the connection between Khan's economic analysis and his political analysis, between his development economics and his political philosophy, between his engagement with the tradition of Marxist political economy and his daily engagement with the practical politics of Bangladeshi democratic life. The economic and the political are, for Khan, aspects of a single reality: the reality of a society organized around specific class relations and specific power structures that must be transformed if the promises of the Liberation War are to be redeemed.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE: POLITICAL ECONOMY AS MORAL PHILOSOPHY

75.1 The Ethics of Economic Life

Khan's political economy is, finally, a moral philosophy as much as an economic analysis. The specific theoretical frameworks he deploys, from Marxist political economy to postcolonial development theory, are not merely analytical tools for describing economic reality; they are articulations of specific moral commitments about what economic life should be and about the obligations that human beings have to each other in the domain of economic activity.

The moral foundation of Khan's economic analysis is the principle of human dignity: the claim that every person has an equal right to the conditions of material life that human dignity requires, and that an economic system that denies those conditions to a large fraction of the population, while providing extravagant material luxury to a small fraction, is a morally defective system that demands transformation. This principle does not require an egalitarianism that denies all differences in material reward; it requires a floor of dignity below which no person should be allowed to fall, and a distribution of economic opportunity that is consistent with the principle of equal human worth.

The moral foundation of his critique of colonialism and neocolonialism is the related principle of equal human worth across cultural and national boundaries: the claim that the people of

Bangladesh have the same right to development, to economic security, and to the conditions of dignified life as the people of wealthy countries, and that an international economic order that systematically transfers wealth from poor countries to rich countries, that denies developing countries the right to pursue their own development strategies, and that maintains global inequality at levels that are impossible to justify in terms of any plausible moral philosophy, is a morally defective order that demands reform.

75.2 Adam Smith and the Moral Foundations of Political Economy

Khan's engagement with the moral foundations of political economy goes back to Adam Smith, the founding figure of the discipline, whose *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) established the basic framework of modern economics but whose earlier work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), provides the moral philosophical foundation for his economic analysis that is often overlooked in the standard presentation of economic thought.

For Smith, economic life is a domain of moral life, organized around the principle of sympathy: the capacity to imagine ourselves in the position of others and to feel what they feel. The market economy is justified, in Smith's moral philosophy, not simply by its efficiency but by its capacity to develop this moral sense through the experience of exchange: by requiring us to take the perspective of others, to understand their needs and preferences, to offer them what they need rather than what we would like to give them. This is a far more morally robust account of the market economy than the crude utilitarian calculus that has dominated mainstream economics since the nineteenth century.

Khan's engagement with Smith's moral philosophy is both appreciative and critical. He appreciates Smith's insistence that economic life is embedded in moral life, and that economic theory cannot be adequate without a moral philosophical foundation. He also appreciates Smith's critique of the commercial spirit's tendency to corrupt character, to substitute calculation for sympathy, and to produce the moral blindness to others' suffering that commercial success often seems to require.

His critical reservations about Smith connect to his broader Marxist critique of classical political economy: Smith's analysis, however morally sophisticated in some dimensions, ultimately provides an ideological justification for the market economy that ignores the class relations of exploitation and appropriation that underlie market exchange. The "invisible hand" that Smith famously invokes is not simply a market mechanism that produces socially optimal outcomes; it is a metaphysical claim that disguises the specific power relations and class interests that determine who benefits from market outcomes.

75.3 John Rawls and Distributive Justice

John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971), the most influential work of political philosophy of the twentieth century's second half, provides another important reference point for Khan's economic ethics. Rawls's theory of distributive justice, organized around the difference principle (the principle that social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they benefit the least

advantaged members of society), offers a powerful argument for a redistributive economic policy that is grounded in liberal democratic values rather than in socialist or Marxist principles.

Khan's engagement with Rawls is appreciative of the difference principle as a standard of distributive justice, but critical of the specific framework within which Rawls develops it. The original position and the veil of ignorance, the thought experiments through which Rawls argues for his principles of justice, are powerful philosophical devices, but they abstract from the specific historical conditions that have produced the existing distribution of wealth and opportunity. A Rawlsian framework applied to the global economy would need to take seriously the colonial history that has produced the specific pattern of global inequality, and a framework that ignored this history in favor of an ideal theory of justice under conditions of freedom and fairness would be, for Khan, inadequate to the demands of the actually existing situation of global injustice.

His preferred framework for global distributive justice combines Rawls's insistence on the priority of the least advantaged with an anti-colonial analysis that situates the existing distribution of wealth and opportunity in its historical context. The standard of justice that Khan applies to the global economy asks not simply whether a given distribution satisfies some formal criterion of fairness but whether it reflects the historical reality that the current global distribution of wealth is the product of centuries of colonial extraction, and that justice therefore requires not just the removal of current barriers to opportunity but some form of reparative redistribution that acknowledges this history.

75.4 The Political Economy of Freedom

The concluding theme of Khan's political economy, which connects it most directly to the broader philosophical framework of his intellectual project, is the concept of freedom. Freedom, for Khan, is not the negative freedom of liberal theory: the absence of coercive constraints on individual choice. It is the positive freedom that Marx analyzed in his early writings as the development of human capacities: the freedom to develop one's full humanity, to exercise one's creativity, to participate fully in the social and cultural life of one's community, to shape the conditions of one's own existence rather than simply being shaped by them.

This positive conception of freedom is, for Khan, the deepest argument for economic development: not the expansion of consumer choice or the increase of GDP, but the expansion of the real possibilities available to every person for the development of their full humanity. An economic system that keeps millions of people in poverty, that denies them access to education and health care, that reduces their existence to the struggle for bare subsistence, is a system that violates the freedom of its most vulnerable members in the most fundamental way.

And an international economic order that maintains global inequality at the levels that currently exist, that denies developing countries the right to pursue their own development paths, that continues to extract wealth from the poor countries of the world for the benefit of the rich countries, is a system that systematically violates the freedom of the majority of humanity. The critique of global capitalism that Khan develops in his political economic work is, at its deepest level, a critique in the name of human freedom: the freedom of the people of Bangladesh, and of

all the world's poor, to develop their full humanity rather than being confined to the subordinate position that the current global order assigns to them.

CONCLUSION TO PART EIGHT: POLITICAL ECONOMY AS ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Part Eight has traced the political economic dimensions of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project. We began with his doctoral dissertation on central banking theory, which established the theoretical foundations for his subsequent economic analysis and gave him a deep engagement with the history of monetary theory and its relationship to the development of capitalist financial systems. We traced his account of the colonial political economy of Bengal, including the drain of wealth, the Permanent Settlement, and the deindustrialization of Bengali manufacturing. We examined his engagement with the traditions of dependency theory and world-systems analysis, and his critical appropriation of these frameworks for the analysis of Bangladesh's specific position in the global economy. We analyzed his critique of the garment industry and its character as dependent development, his engagement with microfinance and the NGO development model, his critique of neoliberal development ideology, and his analysis of the agrarian question and the challenge of rural development.

We also examined his engagement with contemporary development economics, including Piketty on inequality, Sen on capabilities, Chang on industrial policy, and the post-development tradition. And we concluded with his positive vision for an alternative development path organized around democratic public investment, industrial diversification, labor rights, rural development, and climate resilience, grounded in the moral philosophical principles of human dignity, equal human worth, and positive freedom.

Several themes deserve emphasis as we move toward Part Nine.

The first is the unity of Khan's economic and political analysis. His political economy is not separate from his political philosophy; it is the economic expression of the same fundamental commitments to equality, human dignity, and social justice that organize his engagement with communalism, education, language politics, and democratic theory. The economic and the political are, for Khan, aspects of a single reality that must be analyzed and transformed together.

The second theme is the historical depth of his economic analysis. Khan's engagement with the colonial political economy of Bengal is not simply a historical background to a primarily presentist analysis; it is a constitutive part of his understanding of Bangladesh's current economic situation. The patterns of dependency, extraction, and structural underdevelopment that the colonial period established are not simply historical memories; they continue to shape the specific character of Bangladesh's economic challenges in ways that cannot be understood without historical analysis.

The third theme is the practical orientation of his economic analysis. Khan is not an academic economist producing formal models for professional audiences; he is a public intellectual whose

economic analysis is directed toward the practical political question of how to transform the conditions that keep millions of Bangladeshis in poverty and political subordination. His engagement with the specific policy questions of the present moment, from the minimum wage to the IMF conditions to the post-uprising economic agenda, reflects this practical orientation.

Part Nine of this textbook will turn to Khan's legal theory and jurisprudential analysis, examining how his training as a lawyer and his subsequent engagement with legal philosophy inform his analysis of law, rights, justice, and the constitutional foundations of democratic governance in Bangladesh.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART EIGHT

Key Concepts in Political Economy and Development Theory

Surplus Value: In Marxist political economy, the difference between the value that workers produce during the working day and the value they receive as wages. Surplus value is the source of profit in the capitalist system, and its appropriation by capital from labor is, for Marx, the fundamental form of exploitation in a capitalist economy.

The Drain of Wealth: The theory developed by Indian nationalist economist Dadabhai Naoroji in the late nineteenth century, and subsequently elaborated by other scholars including R. C. Dutt and Bipin Chandra Pal, that British colonialism systematically transferred wealth from India to Britain through a combination of unrequited exports, remittances of official salaries and pensions to Britain, and interest payments on debt. Modern historians including Utsa Patnaik have estimated the scale of this drain at enormous sums over the colonial period.

The Prebisch-Singer Thesis: The theoretical argument, developed independently by Raul Prebisch in Argentina and Hans Singer in the UK in the early 1950s, that the terms of trade between primary commodity exporters and manufactured goods exporters tend to deteriorate over time, creating a systematic disadvantage for countries that specialize in primary commodity production.

Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI): The development strategy, associated particularly with the Latin American structuralist tradition and the work of Raul Prebisch and the ECLA, of building domestic manufacturing capacity behind protective tariffs rather than relying on export-oriented primary commodity production. ISI was the dominant development strategy in much of the developing world from the 1950s through the 1970s before being displaced by export-oriented strategies under pressure from the Washington Consensus.

Global Value Chains: The organizational structure of global production, in which different stages of production and distribution of a commodity are performed in different countries, connected through networks of contracts and ownership relationships that create asymmetric power relations among participants. The concept was developed by economic sociologists Gary Gereffi and colleagues in the 1990s and is central to Khan's analysis of the garment industry.

The Washington Consensus: The term coined by economist John Williamson in 1989 to describe the policy package of trade liberalization, financial liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and fiscal austerity that the IMF, World Bank, and US Treasury prescribed for developing countries seeking external financial support. The Washington Consensus became the dominant framework of development policy in the 1980s and 1990s and has been extensively criticized for its negative effects on development in many countries.

The Developmental State: A concept developed in the analysis of East Asian industrialization, particularly in Chalmers Johnson's study of Japan's MITI, to describe a state that is actively engaged in directing the economic development of its society toward long-term industrialization goals. The developmental state contrasts with both the regulatory state of neoliberal prescription and the socialist central planning state.

The Monetary Expression of Labor Time (MELT): A concept developed by Duncan K. Foley and Gerard Dumenil in their reformulation of Marxist value theory, defined as the ratio of the money value of the net product to the total labor time expended in its production. The MELT provides a rigorous foundation for Marx's theory of surplus value that resolves the classical transformation problem.

The Capabilities Approach: The framework for assessing human welfare and development associated primarily with Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which evaluates development in terms of the expansion of human capabilities: the real freedoms that people have to live lives they have reason to value. The capabilities approach is contrasted with both GDP-based measures of development and preference satisfaction accounts of welfare.

Degrowth: An intellectual and political movement that argues for a planned reduction of economic throughput in wealthy countries as a response to ecological limits, organized around the claim that genuine human welfare can be maintained or improved while reducing material consumption by shifting toward higher-value activities and more equitable distribution.

Discussion Questions for Part Eight

1. Khan's doctoral dissertation on central banking in Victorian England might seem remote from his political engagements, but he himself sees it as foundational to his economic analysis. What specific connections do you see between the theoretical issues at stake in the Currency School-Banking School controversy and the economic policy debates of the present day? How does the distinction between commodity money and credit money illuminate current debates about central bank policy?
2. Khan uses the concept of the "drain of wealth" to analyze the colonial political economy of Bengal. How does this concept hold up as an analytical framework? What are its strengths and limitations? How does the contemporary literature on colonial economic history, including recent work by scholars like Utsa Patnaik and Jason Hickel, support or challenge Khan's application of the drain concept?

3. Bangladesh's garment industry has produced both genuine economic improvements (employment for millions, poverty reduction, women's empowerment) and genuine economic harms (exploitation, unsafe conditions, dependent development). How should we evaluate the balance between these effects? What specific changes in the organization of the garment value chain would be needed to preserve the genuine benefits while addressing the harms?
4. Khan is critical of microfinance as a development tool, arguing that its celebration by the international development establishment reflects ideological commitments rather than empirical evidence of effectiveness. How do you evaluate this critique in light of the available evidence on microfinance's effects? Is it possible to both acknowledge the limitations that Khan identifies and maintain a more positive assessment of microfinance's role in the absence of better alternatives?
5. The developmental state model, which Khan advocates for Bangladesh, was successful in East Asia under specific historical conditions. What were those conditions, and how similar or different are Bangladesh's current conditions? What specific obstacles stand in the way of building a developmental state capacity in Bangladesh, and what would be needed to overcome those obstacles?
6. Khan argues that the climate crisis must be understood through the lens of global justice: the wealthy countries that caused the problem bear the primary responsibility for financing adaptation in the most vulnerable developing countries. How do you evaluate this argument? What specific international mechanisms for climate finance would be needed to implement the principle of differentiated responsibility that Khan advocates?
7. Khan's positive vision for Bangladeshi development combines democratic public investment, industrial diversification, labor rights, rural development, and climate resilience. How realistic is this vision given the specific political and economic constraints that Bangladesh faces? What would be the first practical steps toward implementing it, and who would be the social and political forces capable of carrying them out?

Extended Reading List for Part Eight

On the History of Monetary Theory: Walter Bagehot, *Lombard Street* (1873), the most important Victorian text on central banking and financial crises; Henry Thornton, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Paper Credit of Great Britain* (1802), the foundational text of the Banking School tradition; and Duncan K. Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology*, for the most accessible introduction to Foley's approach to the history of economic thought.

On the Colonial Political Economy of Bengal: R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India* (2 vols.), the classic nationalist economic history; Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900-1939*, for the authoritative analysis of colonial industrial development; and Utsa Patnaik, *The Republic of Hunger and Other Essays*, for the most recent scholarly analysis of the colonial drain.

On Dependency Theory and Development: Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*; Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*; and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (vol. 1), for the foundational texts of the dependency and world-systems traditions.

On the Garment Industry and Global Value Chains: Gary Gereffi, John Humphrey, and Timothy Sturgeon, "The Governance of Global Value Chains," *Review of International Political Economy* (2005); and Naila Kabeer, *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka*, for the most careful analysis of the gender dimensions of garment employment.

On Heterodox Development Economics: Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*; Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*; Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State*; and Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, for the major works of heterodox development economics that Khan engages with.

On Islamic Economics and Finance: Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*, for a critical analysis of Islamic economics from within the liberal tradition; and Mehmet Asutay, "A Political Economy Approach to Islamic Economics," *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, for a more sympathetic account.

On Political Philosophy and Economic Justice: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, for the extension of Rawlsian justice theory to the global domain; and Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, for the argument that Rawlsian principles apply globally.

End of Part Eight

Part Nine: Legal Theory, Constitutional Law, and Jurisprudential Analysis: Salimullah Khan's Engagement with Law, Rights, and the Constitutional Foundations of Democratic Governance will follow.

PART NINE: LEGAL THEORY, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, AND JURISPRUDENTIAL ANALYSIS

Salimullah Khan's Engagement with Law, Rights, Justice, and the Constitutional Foundations of Democratic Governance in Bangladesh and the Postcolonial World

PREFACE TO PART NINE

Part Eight of this textbook examined Salimullah Khan's political economy in depth, tracing his intellectual journey from his doctoral dissertation on the history of central banking in Victorian England through his sustained engagement with the colonial political economy of Bengal, dependency theory, the critique of neoliberal development ideology, and the construction of an alternative vision for economic transformation in Bangladesh. We ended with his positive conception of freedom as the moral core of his political economic project: not the negative freedom of liberal theory, not the mere absence of coercive restraint, but the positive freedom that consists in the real expansion of human capacities, the genuine possibility of developing one's full humanity rather than being confined to the position that an unjust economic order assigns to those without power.

Part Nine turns to a dimension of Khan's intellectual project that is in some ways the most foundational of all, because it concerns the institutional architecture within which economic, political, and cultural life takes place: the domain of law. Law, for Khan, is not a technical domain that can be separated from the broader questions of politics, history, and social justice that animate his other intellectual projects. Law is, on the contrary, one of the primary sites where colonial power was exercised, where postcolonial states have reproduced the forms of domination they inherited, and where the contest between formal equality and substantive justice is most visibly and consequentially fought. To understand law as Khan understands it is to understand it not as a neutral system of rules but as a deeply historical, deeply political, and deeply contested terrain of social struggle.

This Part is organized around eight major chapters. The first, Chapter 73, examines Khan's formation as a legal thinker, attending to what his legal education gave him, what it denied him, and how he has subsequently transformed that education into a critical legal theory. Chapter 74 takes up the colonial history of law in Bengal and Bangladesh, examining how British colonial law transformed the social fabric of the subcontinent and how its legacies continue to shape the character of the Bangladeshi legal system today. Chapter 75 examines Khan's constitutional philosophy, including his analysis of the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972 and its subsequent amendments, his understanding of constitutional democracy, and his engagement with the theoretical debates about constitutionalism and popular sovereignty that have shaped democratic theory over the past century. Chapter 76 addresses the question of rights in Khan's legal philosophy, examining his understanding of the relationship between formal rights and substantive justice, his engagement with the international human rights framework, and his critique of rights discourse from a postcolonial perspective. Chapter 77 is dedicated to the legal and constitutional dimensions of the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, an event that Khan analyzed with exceptional depth and acuity, drawing on his entire accumulated intellectual formation to address the constitutional crisis that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the installation of an interim government. Chapter 78 examines Khan's analysis of criminal justice, state violence, and the politics of accountability, including his engagement with the war crimes tribunals, his analysis of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances under successive Bangladeshi governments, and his reflections on transitional justice as a framework for dealing with the legacies of political violence. Chapter 79 addresses the international dimensions of Khan's legal thought, including his analysis of international law, his critique of the international human rights system from a postcolonial perspective, his engagement with questions of sovereignty and self-determination, and his analysis of India's relationship with

Bangladesh as a problem of international legal order. Chapter 80 attempts a synthesis of Khan's jurisprudential positions, identifying the key elements of what might be called a postcolonial legal philosophy and situating it in relation to the major currents of contemporary legal theory.

Throughout Part Nine, as throughout this entire textbook, the goal is not simply to describe Khan's positions but to understand them from the inside: to grasp the logic that connects his legal thinking to his Lacanian-Marxist philosophical framework, to his historical analysis of colonialism and its afterlives, to his political commitments and his vision of what a genuinely just and democratic polity would look like. Law, for Khan, is not a separate department of intellectual life but an integral dimension of the comprehensive critical project that his life's work represents.

CHAPTER 73: THE LAWYER AS CRITICAL THEORIST: FORMATION, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE LEGAL IMAGINATION

73.1 What the Law School Gives and What It Takes Away

When Salimullah Khan enrolled in the law faculty of the University of Dhaka in the late 1970s, he was entering an institution that was itself a legal artifact of colonial history. The University of Dhaka was established in 1921 by the British colonial administration partly as a concession to Muslim elites in Bengal who had been disappointed by the partition of Bengal in 1905 and its subsequent annulment in 1911. Its law faculty was organized along the lines of English legal education, with its emphasis on the study of precedent, the mastery of procedural rules, and the cultivation of an adversarial disposition toward legal argument. The curriculum was built around the common law tradition that the British had imported into the subcontinent, modified in specific ways by the particular legislative interventions of the colonial administration but fundamentally continuous with the legal culture of England.

This educational formation gave Khan several things that would prove invaluable in his subsequent intellectual career. It gave him, first, a disciplined method of textual analysis. The common law tradition is a tradition of close reading: reading statutory text, reading case law, reading the opinions of judges who have applied general principles to specific factual situations and whose reasoning provides the materials from which future cases will be decided. The lawyer reads not only for what a text explicitly says but for what it implies, for the assumptions embedded in its formulations, for the consequences that flow from its application. This habit of careful, consequentialist, and implication-sensitive textual analysis is one that Khan brought to his subsequent reading of philosophical, psychoanalytic, and political texts, and it distinguishes his work from the more free-associative style of some cultural critics.

The law school also gave Khan an understanding of the state as a legal institution. In a way that is not always present in philosophy or literary criticism, legal education forces you to understand how the state actually functions: through what mechanisms it exercises power, through what procedures it translates general norms into specific decisions that bind individuals, through what forms of legitimacy it claims authority. The lawyer's understanding of the state is necessarily

more concrete and more procedural than the philosopher's, and this concreteness has been a resource for Khan in his political analysis, keeping his theoretical commitments grounded in the specific institutional realities of how states actually operate.

But legal education also takes things away, or at least it creates tendencies that must be consciously resisted. The most important of these is the tendency toward formalism: the tendency to analyze legal rules and institutions in their own terms, according to their own internal logic, without reference to the social, economic, and historical conditions that produced them and that they in turn reproduce. Legal formalism is not simply an intellectual error; it is a constitutive feature of legal practice. The lawyer who argues a case before a court must accept the rules of the game: must accept, at least provisionally, the authority of precedent, the authority of statute, the authority of the constitutional order within which litigation takes place. This acceptance is a condition of effective legal practice, but it is a condition that, if unreflectively adopted as a general intellectual stance, leads to a deeply ideological picture of law as an autonomous, self-sufficient, and neutral system of norms.

Khan did not adopt this stance. His legal education coincided with, and in many ways fed, his growing engagement with Marxist theory, with the critical analysis of ideologies, and with the question of how legal forms serve the interests of particular social classes while presenting themselves as universal and impartial. He brought to his legal education the question that Marxist critical theory always asks: *cui bono*, for whose benefit? Whose interests are served by this rule, this procedure, this institutional arrangement? What social relations are presupposed by this legal form, and what social relations does it in turn help to reproduce?

This critical orientation was reinforced by the specific historical moment in which Khan was studying law. Bangladesh in the late 1970s was a society in profound legal-institutional crisis. The Constitution of 1972, which had established a parliamentary democracy with a strong commitment to secularism, nationalism, democracy, and socialism as its four fundamental principles, had been suspended and subsequently amended in ways that dramatically altered the character of the constitutional order. The constitutional amendments introduced by the government of Ziaur Rahman had replaced secularism with faith in the Almighty Allah, had transformed the parliamentary system into a presidential one, and had made other fundamental changes to the constitutional design. The legality of these amendments was genuinely contested, and the question of what a legitimate constitutional order for Bangladesh would look like was an intensely live political question.

For a young law student with Khan's political commitments and intellectual tendencies, this was precisely the right environment for developing a critical rather than a formalist legal sensibility. The question was not what the law said but what the law should say, and in order to answer that question one needed to understand not just the internal logic of legal doctrine but the social and historical forces that had produced the existing legal arrangements and that could potentially produce different ones.

73.2 The Encounter with Legal Philosophy

Khan's engagement with legal philosophy deepened significantly during his years at The New School for Social Research, where his doctoral education in economics was accompanied by an immersion in the broader intellectual culture of that institution. The New School's tradition of critical social theory, its engagement with the Frankfurt School, with phenomenology, with hermeneutics, and with the various currents of European political philosophy, provided Khan with theoretical tools for thinking about law that went beyond anything available in his legal education in Dhaka.

Of particular importance was his encounter with the tradition of critical legal studies, an intellectual movement that emerged in American law schools in the 1970s and 1980s and that brought the tools of critical social theory to the analysis of legal doctrine and institutions. Critical legal studies, or CLS, as it came to be known, challenged the formalist picture of law as a coherent, principled, and neutral system of rules, arguing instead that legal doctrine is fundamentally indeterminate, that legal arguments in most hard cases can be deployed to support either side, and that the outcomes of legal disputes are determined not by the logic of legal reasoning but by the political, social, and economic power of the parties and by the ideological commitments of judges and other legal decision-makers.

The CLS critique was powerful and in many ways liberating for a young intellectual from a postcolonial country who had always suspected that the formal neutrality of the legal system was a mask for substantive partiality. But Khan was also drawn to the more constructive dimensions of critical legal theory: the attempt, associated with thinkers like Roberto Unger and Duncan Kennedy, to identify within the contradictions and tensions of existing legal doctrine the materials for an alternative, more just legal order. Unger's idea that law contains suppressed possibilities, that the contradictions within legal doctrine point toward social arrangements that have not yet been realized, resonated with Khan's dialectical sensibility and his commitment to immanent critique.

Khan was also deeply influenced by the tradition of critical race theory, which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s partly out of dissatisfaction with the limits of the original CLS project. Critical race theorists like Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, and Mari Matsuda argued that the CLS critique, while analytically powerful, had failed to take seriously enough the specific ways in which law operated as an instrument of racial domination and exclusion, and that the experience of people of color needed to be placed at the center of any adequate critical legal theory. This argument was easily translatable, for Khan, into a postcolonial register: the experience of colonized people, of those on whom law had been imposed as an instrument of conquest and exploitation, needed to be at the center of any adequate critical legal theory developed in a postcolonial context.

The encounter with these traditions did not lead Khan to abandon legal doctrine as an object of serious analysis. On the contrary, he came to believe that the detailed analysis of legal doctrine was more important than ever once one understood that law was not a neutral system but a terrain of social struggle: a terrain on which the contradictions of capitalism and colonialism were expressed in institutional form and on which they could potentially be contested and transformed. But this analysis of legal doctrine had to be accompanied by, and grounded in, an

analysis of the social and historical conditions that produced it, and it had to be oriented toward the question of what alternative legal arrangements were possible and desirable.

73.3 Law as a Lacanian Object: Rules, Desire, and the Symbolic Order

One of the most original dimensions of Khan's engagement with law is his use of Lacanian psychoanalysis to illuminate the psychic dimensions of legal experience. This might seem like an unlikely combination: law is, after all, about rules and institutions, about the public domain of social organization, while psychoanalysis is about desire and the unconscious, about the private domain of psychic life. But for Lacan himself, the connection between law and the psyche was fundamental, and Khan draws on this Lacanian insight to develop an analysis of law that goes beyond both legal formalism and conventional sociological analysis.

For Lacan, the law is not just an external constraint on desire; it is the condition of desire itself. The entry into the symbolic order, the order of language and social convention, involves the acceptance of a fundamental prohibition: the prohibition against a certain imagined form of *jouissance*, of unrestricted satisfaction, that Lacan associates with the imaginary relation to the mother. This prohibition, which Lacan calls the Name of the Father or the paternal metaphor, is the foundation of the symbolic order as such: it is what makes language, culture, and social life possible by establishing the differentiating system of rules and distinctions without which no meaningful communication or social coordination could occur.

From this Lacanian perspective, law is not simply one social institution among others; it is the condensed expression of the symbolic order itself, the most explicit and institutionalized form of the system of rules and prohibitions that constitutes social life. To enter the symbolic order is, in a sense, to submit to law: to accept that there are rules that bind, that desire must be mediated through language and social form rather than expressed immediately and without constraint. And this submission is not simply an external constraint on a pre-existing subject; it is constitutive of the subject itself, the condition under which a subject capable of desire and social life comes into being.

Khan uses this Lacanian framework to illuminate several aspects of the relationship between law and society in Bangladesh. First, he uses it to analyze how legal discourse functions as a mode of producing and regulating subjects. The law does not simply prohibit or permit; it constitutes the very subjects whose behavior it regulates. A legal system organized around a particular conception of property rights produces subjects who experience themselves as property owners or as people without property; a legal system organized around a particular conception of citizenship produces subjects who experience themselves as citizens or as foreigners, as included or excluded from the national community. This productive dimension of law, its role in constituting rather than simply regulating social subjects, is, for Khan, one of the most important things that a Lacanian analysis reveals.

Second, Khan uses the Lacanian framework to analyze the specific character of colonial law, understanding it as a symbolic order that was imposed on the colonized people from outside, that constituted colonial subjects as subjects of a law they had not made and did not recognize as their own. The colonial legal subject is, from this perspective, a subject divided between the

formal identity that colonial law assigns to it (the subject of the colonial state, the bearer of rights and obligations within the colonial legal system) and the cultural and psychic identities that preexist and resist that formal assignment. This division, this failure of the colonial legal subject to coincide with the identity that colonial law imposes, is, for Khan, both a source of psychic suffering and a resource for political resistance.

Third, and perhaps most interestingly, Khan uses the Lacanian framework to analyze the specific character of law's relationship to democracy. A democratic legal order, for Khan, is one that acknowledges the constitutive role of the symbolic order while also acknowledging that any particular symbolic order is contingent, the product of historical processes rather than natural necessity, and therefore open to transformation through democratic deliberation and political struggle. The fundamental political question is not whether there will be law, whether there will be a symbolic order that structures social life; it is always which law, which symbolic order, organized around what principles and serving whose interests.

73.4 The Pedagogy of Law: Teaching as Intellectual Practice

Khan's career as a law teacher deserves particular attention, because for him teaching has never been a separate activity from intellectual production but an integral dimension of the same project. His years at Stamford University Bangladesh, where he taught law from 2005 to 2012, were years in which he developed a distinctive pedagogical style that combined rigorous doctrinal analysis with critical theoretical reflection and explicit political engagement.

The most important feature of Khan's pedagogy, as described by former students and as reflected in his published writing about education, is his insistence on the question of why. Why does this rule exist? Why has this principle developed in this way? Why do lawyers argue in these terms rather than in other terms? These are not questions that traditional legal pedagogy is designed to answer; the traditional law school curriculum teaches students to work within the system, to accept its premises and master its techniques, not to ask about the historical and social processes that produced it. Khan's insistence on the why question turns legal education into something more like intellectual inquiry and less like professional training.

This pedagogical orientation connects directly to his broader arguments about the relationship between language, education, and the colonial legacy. The law school that teaches in English, using English-language textbooks and case reports, drawing primarily on English and American precedent, is a law school that reproduces the colonial relationship between the educated elite and the mass of the population whose legal affairs are conducted in Bengali, Sylheti, Chittagonian, and other languages that the formal legal system treats as secondary or irrelevant. Khan's insistence on Bengali as the medium of legal education, which became a significant part of his public advocacy in the 2010s and 2020s, is not simply a linguistic preference but a political and pedagogical position about the relationship between law and democracy.

If law is to be genuinely democratic, if the legal system is to be genuinely responsive to the needs and aspirations of the ordinary people whose lives it governs, then it must be accessible in the language that ordinary people actually speak. The lawyer who can only argue in English is a lawyer who can only serve those clients who also speak English, which in Bangladesh means

those clients who have had access to English-medium education, which in turn means those clients who come from sufficiently privileged socioeconomic backgrounds to have paid for that education. The linguistic politics of the legal system are thus, for Khan, simultaneously a matter of educational equity, democratic legitimacy, and anti-colonial politics.

CHAPTER 74: COLONIAL LAW AND ITS POSTCOLONIAL AFTERLIVES

74.1 The Legal Architecture of Empire

To understand the Bangladeshi legal system as it exists today, one must understand the colonial legal order from which it emerged. The British colonization of Bengal, which began in earnest with the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the subsequent grant of the diwani (revenue collection rights) to the East India Company in 1765, involved not just the conquest of territory and the extraction of economic surplus but the systematic transformation of the legal order within which Bengali society was organized. This legal transformation was, in Khan's analysis, one of the most consequential dimensions of colonialism, because it was through law that the material extraction of colonial surplus was legitimized, institutionalized, and made to appear natural and inevitable.

The colonial legal order was built on a fundamental contradiction. On one hand, British colonialism presented itself as a civilizing mission, and its legal system was presented as a gift of civilization to people who had been living under the arbitrariness of indigenous rulers. The rule of law, in this self-presentation, was a British contribution to Indian governance: the replacement of despotic personal rule with the impersonal, principled, and predictable governance that only a modern legal system could provide. On the other hand, the colonial legal system was explicitly designed to serve the interests of British capital and the colonial state, and it did so in ways that involved systematic violation of the property rights, customary rights, and human rights of the colonized population.

The contradiction was resolved, ideologically, through the construction of a specifically colonial version of the rule of law: a version that applied the principle of legal equality with full force between British subjects while carving out a domain of exceptional and arbitrary power with respect to the colonial relationship itself. British subjects in India were entitled to the full protection of English common law and statute; Indian subjects were entitled to a modified and reduced form of legal protection, and the colonial administration retained broad powers of detention, deportation, and summary punishment that would never have been acceptable in England itself.

Khan analyzes this colonial legal architecture with particular attention to its consequences for the property regime in Bengal. The Permanent Settlement of 1793, which established the zamindari system as the dominant form of property ownership in Bengal, was a legal transformation of extraordinary consequence. By converting zamindars from revenue collectors into hereditary property owners, the Settlement created a class of landlords who stood between the colonial state and the cultivating peasantry, extracting rent from the latter while passing a fixed revenue

demand to the former. The legal rights of zamindars to their estates were modeled on English common law property rights, while the rights of the peasantry to the land they actually cultivated were systematically attenuated and eventually largely eliminated.

This legal transformation of the property regime in Bengal had consequences that are still visible in Bangladesh today. The legacy of zamindari landlordism, the patterns of absentee ownership, the culture of rentier extraction rather than productive investment, the fragmentation of holdings through inheritance and the consequent vulnerability of small cultivators: all of these features of the contemporary Bangladeshi agrarian economy trace their roots to the legal architecture established by the Permanent Settlement and the subsequent modifications introduced by the colonial administration throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

74.2 The Indian Penal Code and Its Colonial Character

Among the specific legal instruments of colonial governance, few have been more consequential for the subsequent development of the legal system in Bangladesh than the Indian Penal Code of 1860, drafted by Thomas Babington Macaulay and his colleagues on the first Law Commission of India and enacted in the aftermath of the Great Uprising of 1857. The IPC, as it is universally known, was a comprehensive codification of criminal law that replaced the patchwork of English common law, customary law, and personal law that had previously governed criminal matters in British India, creating a unified criminal code that applied throughout the territory of British India.

The IPC was, in certain respects, an impressive achievement of legal draftsmanship. Macaulay was a formidable legal intellect, and the Code was drafted with a clarity, consistency, and systematic organization that was ahead of its time. It drew on the tradition of utilitarian legal theory associated with Jeremy Bentham, which Khan has analyzed with characteristic acuity in his broader engagement with the utilitarian tradition, and it represented an attempt to apply the Benthamite ideal of a comprehensive, rational, and codified legal system to the governance of colonial India.

But the IPC was also, and more fundamentally, an instrument of colonial control. Several of its provisions were explicitly designed to suppress political dissent, to criminalize forms of collective action that the colonial administration regarded as threatening to public order, and to provide the colonial state with the legal tools it needed to deal with those who resisted colonial rule. The sedition provision, section 124A of the IPC, which makes it a criminal offense to bring or attempt to bring into hatred or contempt the government established by law, was explicitly targeted at nationalist political activity, and it was used extensively throughout the colonial period to imprison Indian nationalist leaders, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohandas Gandhi.

This sedition provision, which was retained in the Bangladesh Penal Code inherited from the colonial period, has been a recurrent subject of Khan's critical legal analysis. He has pointed out that the retention of sedition law in a sovereign democratic republic that claims to be founded on the principles of free expression and democratic accountability is a profound constitutional anomaly: it is the retention of a colonial instrument of political repression in a post-colonial

constitutional order that claims to have repudiated colonialism. The persistence of sedition law in Bangladesh is, for Khan, not simply a legislative oversight but a symptom of the deeper failure of decolonization in the legal domain: a failure to interrogate and transform the colonial legal heritage, a failure to ask what kind of law a genuinely sovereign, genuinely democratic, genuinely post-colonial people should have.

74.3 Personal Law, Communalism, and the Colonial Management of Religious Difference

One of the most distinctive and consequential features of the colonial legal order in Bengal was its approach to personal law: the law governing matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and family relations. The colonial administration, confronted with a population divided along religious lines with different traditions governing these matters, adopted a policy of managing religious difference through the legal system by maintaining separate personal law systems for Hindus and Muslims, each governed by its own scriptural sources as interpreted by the colonial courts.

This policy, often described as the codification of personal law, had effects that Khan analyzes with considerable sophistication. On one hand, it reflected a genuine attempt by the colonial administration to avoid the politically explosive issue of interfering with religious practice in the domain of family and personal life. On the other hand, the codification process systematically transformed the living, flexible, locally variable customary practices that had actually governed family life in different communities into fixed, textual, and judicially administered systems of law that bore only a partial relationship to the actual practices of the communities they claimed to govern.

The codification of Hindu personal law, which drew heavily on the Brahminic textual tradition as interpreted by a particular school of Sanskrit learning, simultaneously marginalized the customary practices of lower caste communities and created a unified Hindu legal identity that had not previously existed in the same form. The codification of Muslim personal law, similarly, elevated the textual tradition of classical Islamic jurisprudence, as interpreted by British-trained judges applying colonial evidentiary standards, over the locally variable customary practices that many Muslim communities actually observed. Both processes had the effect of hardening communal identities, creating legally constituted communities with clearly defined boundaries and distinct legal regimes, in ways that contributed to the communalization of Bengali social life.

Khan sees this colonial management of religious difference through personal law as one of the principal mechanisms through which the colonial administration produced and reproduced communalism as a political force. Communalism, the organization of political life around religious community boundaries, is not, in Khan's analysis, a natural expression of pre-existing religious differences; it is in significant measure a product of the specific legal and administrative arrangements through which the colonial state managed its divided population. The communal riots that periodically devastated Bengal in the later colonial period, the eventual partition of 1947 along communal lines, the recurrence of communal violence in independent India and Bangladesh: all of these can be traced, at least in part, to the legal architecture through which the colonial administration managed religious diversity and in doing so transformed it into a principle of political identity and conflict.

74.4 The Transfer of Power and the Continuity of Legal Structures

The independence of Bangladesh in 1971, achieved through a war of liberation against Pakistani military rule, might appear to represent a fundamental break with the colonial legal order. The new state established its own constitutional framework, declared its commitment to fundamentally different principles from those of the colonial administration, and initiated a process of legislative reform that modified many of the inherited legal arrangements. And yet, Khan argues, the structural continuity of the legal system with its colonial predecessor is more significant than its formal transformation.

The Bangladesh Penal Code is substantially the Indian Penal Code with minor modifications. The Code of Civil Procedure that governs civil litigation in Bangladesh courts traces its lineage directly to the colonial code. The Evidence Act, which determines what kinds of evidence are admissible in court proceedings, is similarly a direct inheritance from the colonial period. The structure of the judiciary, with its hierarchies of subordinate courts and high courts, its distinction between the higher judiciary whose members are appointed by complex processes involving the executive and the existing judiciary, and the lower judiciary whose members are recruited through competitive examination: this structure was established by the colonial administration and has been modified but not fundamentally transformed in the post-colonial period.

This structural continuity of the legal system with its colonial predecessor is, for Khan, both a practical problem and a theoretical one. It is a practical problem because the specific legal rules and procedures that were designed to serve the interests of colonial governance are not necessarily well-suited to the governance of a sovereign, democratic, post-colonial state. Rules designed to facilitate the extraction of colonial surplus from peasant cultivators are not the same as rules designed to promote equitable agricultural development; procedures designed to suppress nationalist political dissent are not the same as procedures designed to protect the right of political opposition; an evidentiary system designed to handle the relatively simple disputes of a preindustrial agricultural society is not the same as an evidentiary system adequate to the complex commercial, environmental, and human rights disputes of a twenty-first century developing economy.

The structural continuity is also a theoretical problem because it reveals the limits of formal independence as a mechanism of decolonization. The formal transfer of sovereignty from the colonial power to the indigenous successor state does not automatically transform the legal order that colonialism established; it simply transfers the formal authority to administer that order from colonial officials to indigenous ones. True decolonization of the legal order would require not just formal independence but the substantive transformation of the inherited legal structures: the critical examination of colonial legal doctrine and its reconstruction in accordance with the needs, values, and democratic aspirations of the post-colonial population.

This transformation, Khan argues, has barely begun in Bangladesh. The post-colonial legal reformer has confronted the same problem that haunted all aspects of post-colonial development: the problem of path dependence, of the tendency for inherited institutions to reproduce themselves even in the absence of the specific conditions that originally produced them, because the very people who might transform the institutions are those who have been trained within

them and whose professional identities are shaped by their acceptance of inherited institutional structures.

CHAPTER 75: CONSTITUTIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

75.1 The Constitution of 1972: Promise and Its Limitations

The Bangladesh Constitution of 1972, adopted less than a year after the achievement of independence, was a document born of extraordinary circumstances. It was drafted in the immediate aftermath of a war of liberation that had cost hundreds of thousands of lives, that had seen the systematic targeting of intellectuals and Hindu minorities by the Pakistani military, and that had concluded with the intervention of Indian armed forces and the surrender of the Pakistani army. The constitution-makers were working in a context of enormous urgency, intense political pressure, and profound uncertainty about the future of the new state, and the document they produced bears the marks of these circumstances.

The constitution established Bangladesh as a parliamentary democracy, with a unicameral legislature (the Jatiya Sangsad), a Prime Minister as head of government accountable to the legislature, and a President with largely ceremonial powers. It declared as its four fundamental principles nationalism, democracy, socialism, and secularism (often referred to by their Bengali initials as the four pillars of the Mujib government). It established an extensive bill of rights, including rights to equality, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and association, rights to education and work, and protections against arbitrary arrest and detention. And it created a Supreme Court with the power of judicial review, the power to strike down legislation that violates the constitution.

Khan's analysis of the 1972 Constitution is nuanced and multi-dimensional. He acknowledges its genuine achievements: its commitment to popular sovereignty, its republican character, its declaration of fundamental rights, its establishment of judicial independence, its secular orientation in a Muslim-majority country. These were, in the context of South Asian constitution-making, significant and in some respects radical commitments, and they reflected the genuine democratic and progressive aspirations of the liberation movement.

But Khan also identifies the limitations and tensions within the constitutional document that would prove to have momentous consequences for the subsequent political history of Bangladesh. The most significant of these was the tension between parliamentary democracy and executive dominance. The constitution was drafted by the Awami League, and its specific provisions reflected the political circumstances and interests of that party in 1972. Several of its provisions concentrated significant power in the hands of the executive, creating institutional arrangements that would prove highly susceptible to the authoritarian tendencies that subsequently manifested themselves in Bangladeshi politics.

The Fourth Amendment of 1975, passed just three years after the constitution's adoption, amended the original constitutional design in ways that dramatically altered its character. The amendment transformed Bangladesh from a parliamentary to a presidential system, created a one-party state, and concentrated power in the hands of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to a degree that was incompatible with democratic governance. This amendment, adopted under circumstances of intense pressure and political manipulation, and passed by a parliament whose members were in many cases complicit in or coerced into supporting it, represented, in Khan's analysis, a constitutional betrayal of the principles of the liberation movement.

The significance of this analysis for Khan's broader constitutional philosophy is considerable. The ease with which the 1972 Constitution was fundamentally amended, the willingness of the political leadership to use constitutional amendment as a mechanism for concentrating power rather than as a mechanism for responding to genuinely changed circumstances or correcting constitutional deficiencies, reveals what Khan sees as a fundamental weakness in the constitutional culture of Bangladesh: a tendency to treat the constitution as an instrument of political power rather than as a higher law that constrains and binds political power.

This tendency, which Khan traces through the subsequent constitutional amendments under Zia, Ershad, and the Awami League governments of the twenty-first century, reflects a deeper problem in the relationship between law and politics in Bangladesh: the problem of constitutional instrumentalism, the treatment of the constitution as a tool to be deployed in the service of particular political interests rather than as a framework that defines and limits what political power may do.

75.2 The Secularism Debate: Constitutional Principle and Political Reality

No aspect of the Bangladesh Constitution has been more contested in Khan's intellectual engagement than the principle of secularism. The original 1972 Constitution declared secularism as one of the four fundamental principles of the state, but the meaning of secularism in the Bangladeshi context was from the beginning ambiguous and contested. The Bengali term *dharmanirapeksata*, used in the constitution to express the principle of secularism, might be more literally translated as religious neutrality than as the strict separation of religion and state that the English term secularism sometimes implies.

Khan's analysis of the secularism debate begins with a careful examination of what secularism meant in the context of the liberation movement and the 1972 Constitution. He argues that the secularism of the liberation movement was primarily an anti-communalist principle: a rejection of the communal politics of the Pakistani state, which had organized political life around the supposedly shared Islamic identity of East and West Pakistan and had used that claim to justify the domination of the east by the west. The secularism of 1971 was not a declaration of irreligion or a rejection of Islam; it was a declaration that the state would not use religion as a basis for discriminating between citizens, that Bengali Muslim and Bengali Hindu would have equal status before the law, and that the identity of the new state would be primarily linguistic and cultural (Bengali) rather than religious (Islamic).

The Fifth Amendment of 1977, adopted under the military government of Ziaur Rahman, replaced secularism with the phrase absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah as one of the constitutional principles. This amendment, Khan argues, was not simply a religious statement; it was a deliberate political strategy to redefine the identity of the Bangladeshi state in ways that would delegitimize the Awami League's claim to represent the authentic spirit of the liberation movement and that would create a new constitutional basis for the rule of the BNP and its military sponsors.

The subsequent history of secularism in the Bangladesh Constitution is, in Khan's telling, a history of its repeated redefinition and manipulation in the service of the specific political interests of whichever party happened to be in power. The Fifteenth Amendment of 2011, passed under the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, restored secularism as a constitutional principle while simultaneously retaining the phrase Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) in the preamble and maintaining Islam as the state religion, a provision that had been introduced by the Eighth Amendment in 1988. The resulting constitutional text contained a set of provisions that were arguably in tension with each other, asserting both secularism and Islamic state religion in ways that could not be easily reconciled.

For Khan, this constitutional history of secularism reveals a fundamental failure of constitutional thinking in Bangladesh: the failure to work out a coherent, principled, and stable account of the relationship between religious tradition and democratic governance. The problem is not simply legal or technical; it is philosophical. What should the relationship between a religious tradition and a democratic state be? How can a state that takes seriously the religious commitments of its majority population while respecting the rights of religious minorities and non-believers construct a constitutional order that is both democratically legitimate and genuinely pluralistic?

Khan's answer to this question draws on his broader engagement with the relationship between religion and politics, and it is more complex than either a straightforwardly secular or a straightforwardly Islamic position. He argues that the Bengali Muslim tradition, properly understood, contains within it resources for a democratic and pluralistic politics that are suppressed by both the communalist politics of Islamist parties and the secularist politics that treats religion as a purely private matter without political relevance. The tradition of Lalou Shah, of the Baul movements, of the syncretic popular Islam that has characterized Bengali religious life for centuries, is a tradition that is open to religious pluralism, that does not treat the boundaries between communities as absolute, and that is compatible with the democratic commitments of the liberation movement.

Khan invokes here the figure of Kazi Nazrul Islam, whom he regards as one of the most important thinkers of the anti-colonial tradition in Bengal, precisely because Nazrul's work expressed a form of religious commitment that was simultaneously deeply Islamic and deeply anti-communal, simultaneously rooted in Bengali Muslim tradition and open to the broader currents of Bengali and global cultural life. Nazrul, for Khan, represents the possibility of a religious politics that is not communalist, that does not organize political life around the exclusion of religious others, and that is therefore compatible with the democratic pluralism that the Bangladeshi constitutional order needs.

75.3 Parliamentary Sovereignty versus Constitutional Supremacy

One of the most important questions in constitutional theory is the relationship between parliamentary sovereignty and constitutional supremacy. In the English constitutional tradition, which has exercised enormous influence over the legal systems of former British colonies, the principle of parliamentary sovereignty holds that Parliament is the supreme lawmaking authority, that no court can strike down an Act of Parliament, and that the only constraints on parliamentary power are political rather than legal. The constitution, in this tradition, is simply the aggregate of existing constitutional arrangements, continuously revisable by the ordinary processes of legislation.

In contrast, the American constitutional tradition, which has exercised a different but equally important influence over post-colonial constitutionalism, holds that the constitution is a higher law that limits even the sovereign legislature, that certain rights and principles are entrenched against ordinary legislative amendment, and that courts have the power and the duty to strike down legislation that violates these entrenched principles. This model of constitutional supremacy has been widely adopted in post-colonial constitutional design, reflecting the understanding that formal independence from colonial rule is insufficient without institutional protections against the potential authoritarianism of indigenous governments.

The Bangladesh Constitution of 1972, as originally adopted, represented a significant attempt to establish constitutional supremacy rather than parliamentary sovereignty. The declaration that the constitution was the supreme law of the land, the entrenchment of fundamental rights enforceable through judicial review, the creation of a Supreme Court with constitutional jurisdiction: all of these were features of a constitutional supremacy model. But the ease with which constitutional amendments were subsequently used to subvert rather than protect constitutional principles suggests that the formal establishment of constitutional supremacy was insufficient without a corresponding constitutional culture, without the shared commitment among political elites, judicial actors, and ordinary citizens to treating the constitution as genuinely binding on all exercises of political power.

Khan analyzes this problem with characteristic depth. He argues that the failure of constitutional supremacy in Bangladesh is not simply a failure of institutional design, though it is partly that. It is also, and more fundamentally, a failure of what he calls constitutional consciousness: the shared understanding among citizens and political actors that the constitution is not just a piece of paper but a social compact, an expression of the fundamental principles on which the community agrees to organize its collective life, and therefore something that deserves respect and obedience even when it constrains what might be politically convenient.

The development of constitutional consciousness is, for Khan, one of the most important tasks of political education in Bangladesh. This is not primarily a matter of teaching people the technical provisions of the constitutional text; it is a matter of cultivating a political culture in which constitutional principles are genuinely internalized as values rather than merely respected as formal constraints. And this cultural transformation requires, among other things, the development of a constitutional narrative: a story about what the constitution means, what

principles it expresses, and what vision of collective life it embodies, that can be taught, debated, and affirmed in the schools, the media, and the various forums of public life.

75.4 The Question of Constituent Power

Perhaps the most theoretically sophisticated aspect of Khan's constitutional philosophy is his engagement with the question of constituent power: the power of the people, as the ultimate source of constitutional authority, to found and re-found political communities. This concept, developed in the tradition of political thought running from the abbé Sieyès through Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt to the contemporary debates in constitutional theory, addresses the paradox of democratic constitutionalism: the constitution binds even the democratic legislature that operates under it, but the democratic people are supposed to be the ultimate sovereign. How can the sovereign people be bound by a constitution that was itself made by a previous generation?

Khan engages with this paradox through a reading of the constitutional significance of the liberation movement of 1971. He argues that the liberation war represented an exercise of constituent power in the most fundamental sense: the Bengali people, through their mass uprising against Pakistani military rule, asserted their right to constitute a new political community on their own terms, in accordance with their own values and aspirations. The Constitution of 1972 was, ideally, the expression of this constituent power: the attempt to give permanent institutional form to the principles that had animated the liberation struggle.

But the constituent power of the liberation movement, Khan argues, was betrayed almost immediately by the political forces that claimed to represent it. The Fourth Amendment of 1975, the military coups and subsequent constitutional manipulations, the gradual erosion of the constitutional commitments to democracy, secularism, and social justice: all of these represented, for Khan, a betrayal of the constituent power of the Bangladeshi people, a substitution of the power of specific political elites for the genuinely democratic power of the people as a whole.

This analysis of the betrayal of constituent power is not simply a retrospective historical judgment; it is the theoretical framework within which Khan analyzes the July 2024 uprising, which he sees as a new exercise of constituent power: a new assertion by the Bangladeshi people, and particularly by its younger generations, of their right to hold political power accountable to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that were the animating values of the liberation movement. This analysis will be taken up in detail in Chapter 77.

CHAPTER 76: RIGHTS, JUSTICE, AND LEGAL PLURALISM IN KHAN'S JURISPRUDENCE

76.1 The Critique of Rights Discourse

Rights discourse has been the dominant language of progressive politics in the post-World War II international order, and the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972, reflecting the global consensus

of its moment, included an extensive bill of rights. Yet Khan's relationship to rights discourse is complex and in important ways critical. He does not reject the language of rights altogether, but he subjects it to a sustained analysis that reveals its limitations and its potential for ideological distortion.

The most fundamental critique that Khan brings to rights discourse is the Marxist critique of formal rights: the observation, made most powerfully by the young Marx in *On the Jewish Question*, that the rights proclaimed by liberal constitutional orders are formal rights that abstract from the real social conditions of their bearers. The right to equality before the law means little if the parties appearing before the law are systematically unequal in economic resources, in access to legal representation, in cultural capital, and in social power. The right to property means different things to those who have substantial property and to those who have none. The right to free expression means different things to those who own media outlets and to those who can only access public discourse by standing in the street with a placard.

This Marxist critique of formal rights does not, however, lead Khan to a simple dismissal of rights talk. He is aware that the critique can go too far, that the formal rights of constitutional democracy are genuine achievements, that the difference between a legal system that formally recognizes rights and one that does not is a real and important difference even if formal recognition is insufficient by itself. The point of the critique is not to abandon rights but to insist on their substantive rather than merely formal character: to insist that real rights require real social conditions for their exercise, and that a political commitment to rights must therefore be a commitment to the transformation of those social conditions that prevent their genuine exercise.

This is what Khan calls the substantive conception of rights: the understanding that rights are not simply formal entitlements but real capacities, real possibilities of action and self-determination, that require material conditions for their realization. The right to education means something only if there are schools, teachers, and the economic conditions that allow children to attend school rather than having to work. The right to health means something only if there is a health care system that is accessible to those who need it. The right to equal treatment before the law means something only if legal services are available on equal terms to all litigants.

76.2 International Human Rights Law and Its Postcolonial Critique

Khan's engagement with the international human rights system is similarly nuanced and critical. He does not dismiss the international human rights framework as simply an instrument of Western imperialism, as some postcolonial critics have done; he recognizes its genuine achievements, including the formal recognition of universal rights that cannot be denied on grounds of race, gender, religion, or national origin, and the development of international mechanisms for the monitoring and enforcement of these rights. But he subjects the international human rights system to a critical analysis that reveals its limitations and its complicity with forms of power that it ought to challenge.

The first dimension of Khan's critique of international human rights law concerns its historical origins. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, was adopted at a moment when the majority of the world's population was

living under colonial rule: the very colonial powers that drafted and voted for the Universal Declaration were simultaneously maintaining colonial empires that systematically violated the human rights of hundreds of millions of people. The right to self-determination, which Khan regards as the most fundamental of all human rights, was initially interpreted in ways that excluded colonized peoples from its scope, a reading that was successfully challenged by the independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s but that left a permanent ambiguity in the human rights framework about the relationship between individual rights and collective self-determination.

The second dimension of Khan's critique concerns the architecture of the international human rights system and its relationship to global power. The human rights bodies of the United Nations, the international treaty bodies, the special procedures, the Universal Periodic Review: these institutions can and do generate valuable documentation of human rights violations, but their capacity to hold powerful states accountable for those violations is severely limited. The most powerful states in the international system, and particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, are effectively immune from serious international legal accountability for their human rights violations. The United States can conduct a war in Iraq that kills hundreds of thousands of civilians without being held legally accountable; China can carry out systematic repression in Xinjiang without effective international legal sanction; India can carry out operations in Kashmir without genuine accountability.

This asymmetry in the international human rights system, its tendency to be invoked against weaker states while powerful states escape accountability, is, for Khan, a structural feature of the system rather than a contingent failure. The international human rights system was built by powerful states, is primarily funded by powerful states, and is ultimately dependent on the cooperation of powerful states for its effectiveness. It therefore tends, systematically, to reflect the priorities and serve the interests of those states, even as it claims to apply universal standards equally.

This analysis becomes particularly pointed when Khan turns to the question of India's relationship with Bangladesh. Khan has been consistently critical of what he sees as India's tendency to invoke human rights concerns in Bangladesh in ways that serve Indian strategic interests rather than the genuine protection of human rights. His December 2024 statement that India wants to keep Bangladesh as its colony using the excuse of its helping the country in its war of liberation in 1971 is, in this context, not a dismissal of human rights concerns as such but a critique of the instrumentalization of human rights language in the service of hegemonic politics.

76.3 Legal Pluralism and the Challenge of Islamic Law

One of the most practically and theoretically challenging issues in Bangladeshi constitutional and legal thought is the question of the relationship between secular state law and Islamic law. Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country whose constitutional order claims to be secular or at least religiously neutral, but whose population is deeply attached to Islamic values and whose legal system contains significant elements of personal law that draw on the Islamic legal tradition. The question of how to manage this relationship between secular state law and Islamic

law is one that Khan has engaged with extensively, and his analysis is marked by the same combination of theoretical sophistication and political realism that characterizes his best work.

Khan's approach to the Islamic law question begins with a rejection of the terms in which the debate is usually framed. The conventional framing presents a stark choice between secular law and Islamic law, between a constitutional order modeled on Western liberal principles and a constitutional order modeled on Islamic jurisprudential principles. This framing, Khan argues, is fundamentally misleading because it treats both secular law and Islamic law as fixed, homogeneous, and mutually exclusive systems, when in reality both are internally diverse, historically developed, and continuously contested traditions.

The Islamic legal tradition, or what is called *shari'a* in common discourse, is not a single, fixed system of rules but a vast and internally differentiated tradition of jurisprudential reasoning that has developed over fourteen centuries, that is differently interpreted by different schools of jurisprudence (*madhhabs*), that is applied differently in different political and social contexts, and that has been subject to continuous debate, reinterpretation, and development by generations of Muslim jurists. The proposition that Bangladesh should adopt Islamic law is ambiguous to the point of meaninglessness until one specifies which school of jurisprudence, which interpretive tradition, and which specific provisions of that tradition one has in mind.

Similarly, the secular law of the Bangladeshi state is not a purely neutral or universal system of rules but a historically specific product of colonial legal development, modified by post-colonial legislative reform, and reflecting the specific interests and values of those who have controlled the legislative process. The claim that the secular state's law is neutral with respect to religion is, at best, a formal claim that collapses on examination; in practice, the legal system reflects specific cultural values, specific conceptions of property, family, and social organization, and specific priorities in the allocation of rights and protections that are not neutral but are the product of the specific history through which the legal system developed.

Khan's approach to legal pluralism draws on the tradition of socio-legal scholarship associated with thinkers like Sally Merry, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and Franz von Benda-Beckmann, who have documented the ways in which multiple normative orders (state law, religious law, customary law, transnational law) coexist and interact in the governance of social life in most societies of the world. This literature challenges the state-centric view of law, the assumption that the only real law is the law of the state, and recognizes the genuine normative force of non-state legal orders in organizing and governing social life.

But Khan's engagement with legal pluralism is not simply an academic recognition of the empirical reality of multiple normative orders; it is a normative and political argument about what the relationship between these orders should be. He argues that the democratic constitutional order cannot simply acknowledge and incorporate non-state legal orders without asking the critical questions: do these non-state orders respect the fundamental rights of their members? Do they operate through democratic processes of norm-formation? Do they allow their members to exit and choose alternative governance arrangements? A state that incorporates Islamic personal law without ensuring that women within that system have genuine choices about their marriage and family arrangements is not engaged in progressive pluralism; it is

deferring to a patriarchal authority structure that limits the real freedom of the women who are subject to it.

This critical approach to legal pluralism distinguishes Khan's position from both the liberal secularist position that would simply impose uniform state law on all citizens regardless of their religious and cultural commitments, and the communalist position that would simply defer to religious authority in the domain of personal law. He insists on the primacy of individual rights, and particularly the rights of women, as the standard against which any legal pluralism must be evaluated, while also recognizing that the formal imposition of secular family law on communities with deep Islamic commitments may be both politically impossible and culturally disrespectful if not accompanied by the broader social transformation that makes formal legal rights meaningful in practice.

76.4 Rights and the Question of Social and Economic Rights

Khan's engagement with the question of social and economic rights reflects his broader political-economic commitments and his critique of the liberal priority of civil and political rights. The conventional liberal constitutional tradition has treated social and economic rights, rights to education, to health care, to decent work, to an adequate standard of living, as qualitatively different from civil and political rights: as aspirational goals rather than justiciable entitlements, as programmatic commitments that states should work toward rather than individual rights that courts can enforce.

Khan rejects this distinction. His rejection draws on several lines of argument, both theoretical and comparative. Theoretically, he argues that the distinction between justiciable civil and political rights and non-justiciable social and economic rights reflects the same liberal ideological framework that he critiques in his analysis of formal rights more generally: it is the distinction between the sphere of negative liberty (freedom from state interference) and the sphere of positive entitlement (claims on state resources), a distinction that reflects the specific interests of those classes who benefit from the protection of property and formal liberty while resisting the redistribution of resources that would make those formal liberties meaningful for everyone.

Comparatively, he points to the experience of several constitutional orders, including India's Supreme Court jurisprudence on socioeconomic rights, the South African Constitution's justiciable socioeconomic rights, and the development of international social rights jurisprudence under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to show that the claimed non-justiciability of social and economic rights is not an inherent feature of rights adjudication but a political choice that can be made differently.

For Bangladesh, Khan argues that the constitutional recognition and judicial enforcement of social and economic rights is not just a matter of justice in the abstract but a practical necessity for the kind of democratic development that he envisions. A constitutional order that guarantees only civil and political rights while leaving the distribution of economic resources entirely to the market creates a formal democracy without substantive equality: a democracy in which the same formal procedures apply to the rich and the poor, but whose substantive outcomes are

systematically shaped by the enormous inequalities in economic and social power that characterize Bangladeshi society.

CHAPTER 77: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING: LAW, CONSTITUTION, AND DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

77.1 The Constitutional Crisis of 2024

The events of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh represented, in Khan's analysis, a constitutional crisis of the first order: a crisis in which the fundamental question of democratic legitimacy, the question of whether a government that has lost the genuine consent of the governed retains constitutional authority, was posed with unusual clarity and urgency. The quota reform movement, which began as a student-led protest against the system of reservations in government employment, rapidly developed into a broader mass uprising against what was perceived as an authoritarian and corrupt government that had entrenched itself in power through electoral manipulation and the systematic suppression of political opposition.

Khan's engagement with these events was not merely that of a commentator; it was, as he has subsequently described, a moment of genuine personal decision. His speech at ULAB on July 31, 2024, in which he called for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, was, in his own words, a response to a Fanonian imperative: the recognition that there comes a time when silence becomes dishonesty. The invocation of Fanon here is not incidental; it connects Khan's reading of the 2024 uprising to his broader theoretical framework and to the intellectual tradition of anti-colonial political thought that has shaped his work throughout his career.

The constitutional dimension of Khan's analysis of the 2024 events is multifaceted and deserves careful examination. His first observation is about the nature of the constitutional order that was challenged by the uprising. He argues that the Bangladeshi state under the Awami League government had developed characteristics that placed it in tension with its constitutional foundations: characteristics that he describes as fascist in Gramscian terms, meaning not fascism in the narrow historical sense of European interwar fascism but the use of state power to suppress political opposition, manipulate electoral processes, control media and civil society, and maintain in power a government that had lost genuine democratic legitimacy.

This characterization is controversial and requires careful analysis. Khan is not claiming that the Awami League government was comparable to Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Italy in its ideology or methods; he is making a more specific claim about the relationship between formal constitutional structures and actual political practice. The constitutional forms of parliamentary democracy, regular elections, judicial review, free expression: these were formally maintained under the Awami League government, but their substantive operation was systematically undermined. Elections were held but the results were predetermined; courts functioned but their independence was compromised; civil society organizations operated but under increasing constraints; opposition politicians were prosecuted under laws that were applied selectively and in politically motivated ways.

The argument that this situation constituted a constitutional crisis in the deepest sense, not merely an instance of governmental misconduct that could be addressed through existing constitutional procedures, was based on Khan's reading of the constituent power argument introduced in Chapter 75. If the constitution derives its legitimacy from the constituent power of the democratic people, and if the political leadership that claims to govern in accordance with the constitution has, through its systematic subversion of democratic processes, lost the genuine consent of the governed, then the people retain the constituent power to reconstitute the political order. The July 2024 uprising was, from this perspective, an exercise of constituent power: a democratic assertion by the people, and particularly by the youth, of their right to hold power accountable to the principles on which the constitutional order was supposed to be founded.

77.2 The Right to Resistance and the Problem of Constitutional Legitimacy

Khan's analysis of the 2024 uprising raises a question that has been central to political philosophy since at least the seventeenth century: the question of the right to resistance. Under what circumstances do citizens have not just the moral right but the political and perhaps legal right to resist a government that they regard as illegitimate? This question was addressed by Locke in his *Second Treatise*, who argued that a government that persistently violates the fundamental rights of its subjects forfeits its claim to political authority and that the people may resume the power they had originally delegated to it. It was addressed differently by Rousseau, by Kant, by Marx, and by the tradition of anti-colonial theory associated with Fanon.

Khan's engagement with this question draws on all of these traditions but is most directly shaped by his reading of the liberation movement of 1971 as the foundational political act of the Bangladeshi state. The liberation movement was itself an act of resistance: a resistance to the Pakistani state that had violated the democratic rights of the Bengali people by refusing to accept the results of the 1970 election, by launching a military campaign of terror against the Bengali civilian population, and by systematically denying the Bengali people the right of self-determination to which they were entitled. The constitution of Bangladesh is, in Khan's reading, not just a legal document but a political charter whose authority derives from this founding act of democratic resistance.

This means that the constitution itself, properly understood, contains within it a principle of democratic resistance: the principle that political authority is legitimate only insofar as it is grounded in the genuine consent of the governed, and that a government that systematically subverts this consent forfeits its constitutional authority. This is not an extra-constitutional or anarchist principle; it is a principle inscribed in the constitutional order itself by its founding act.

The application of this principle to the 2024 situation is, however, not without complexity. Khan is careful to distinguish between the democratic legitimacy of the uprising itself, which he affirms, and the specific political demands and processes that followed from it. The resignation of Sheikh Hasina and the installation of an interim government did not automatically resolve the constitutional questions that the crisis had raised; it opened a new set of questions about the constitutional basis of the interim government, the process through which a new constitutional settlement would be reached, and the principles that should govern the transition from the crisis situation to a new, more genuinely democratic constitutional order.

77.3 The Interim Government and Constitutional Legitimacy

The constitutional status of the interim government that was established following the resignation of Sheikh Hasina was a matter of intense legal and political controversy, and Khan's analysis of this controversy is one of the most technically sophisticated aspects of his engagement with the 2024 events. The Bangladesh Constitution does not provide for the kind of non-partisan interim government that was established in August 2024; its provisions for government formation assume that a government will be formed by a political party that commands a parliamentary majority.

The interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, operated outside this constitutional framework, drawing its legitimacy not from the constitutional provisions for government formation but from the political situation created by the uprising: from the resignation of the elected government, the effective suspension of normal constitutional operations, and the broadly shared recognition that some form of governance was necessary during the transition to a new democratic order. Khan's analysis of this situation draws on the tradition of constitutional thought about states of exception, associated most prominently with Carl Schmitt and critically engaged by Giorgio Agamben, Walter Benjamin, and others.

For Schmitt, the state of exception, the situation in which normal constitutional rules are suspended or cannot function, reveals the true nature of sovereignty: sovereignty is defined by the power to decide on the exception, to determine when normal constitutional rules do not apply and what rules, if any, should apply in their place. This analysis is politically troubling because it suggests that constitutional order is always dependent on a prior political decision that is itself not governed by constitutional rules, that constitutional legitimacy always rests on a foundation of political power that is not itself constitutionally constrained.

Khan's engagement with this Schmittian challenge is dialectical. He acknowledges the empirical force of the observation that constitutional orders always depend on prior political decisions that they cannot themselves fully justify. But he argues that this observation does not lead to the nihilistic conclusion that constitutional legitimacy is therefore illusory; it leads instead to the recognition that constitutional legitimacy is an ongoing achievement, a continuously renewed political commitment to the principles that the constitutional order embodies, rather than a once-and-for-all founding act.

The legitimacy of the interim government, on this analysis, depended not on its formal constitutional basis, which was admittedly irregular, but on its substantive commitment to the principles of democratic governance: to the protection of rights, the restoration of democratic processes, the accountability of state power, and the creation of conditions under which the Bangladeshi people could exercise their constituent power to reconstitute the political order on a genuinely democratic foundation. This is a demanding standard, and Khan's analysis of the interim government's performance in meeting it was, characteristically, nuanced and in important respects critical.

77.4 Khan and the Politics of the Post-Uprising Settlement

Khan's engagement with the political developments of the post-uprising period has been extensive and multi-dimensional, touching on questions of electoral reform, constitutional revision, the accountability of the former government, the protection of minorities, and the economic policy agenda of the interim government. Several themes deserve particular attention for what they reveal about his legal and constitutional philosophy.

The first is the question of accountability for the violence of the suppression. The crackdown on the quota reform protesters in July 2024, which Khan characterized as the action of a fascist government, resulted in numerous deaths, injuries, and arbitrary detentions. Khan has insisted on the accountability of those responsible for these violations, including not just the immediate perpetrators but the political leadership that ordered or authorized the crackdown. This insistence on accountability connects to his broader engagement with transitional justice, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 78.

The second theme is the question of electoral reform. Khan has argued that genuine democratic renewal in Bangladesh requires not just the replacement of the Awami League government with a different government but the structural transformation of the electoral system: reforms that would make elections genuinely competitive, that would prevent the incumbent government from manipulating the electoral process in its favor, and that would create the conditions for the peaceful transfer of power. These structural reforms require, in his analysis, constitutional amendments as well as changes to electoral legislation, and they require a degree of political consensus that has been difficult to achieve given the depth of partisan conflict in Bangladeshi politics.

The third theme is the question of minority protection. The incidents of communal violence against Hindu minorities that occurred in the aftermath of the August 2024 change of government were, for Khan, a deeply disturbing indication of the persistence of communalist sentiment in Bangladeshi society and of the fragility of the constitutional commitments to equal citizenship. His analysis of these incidents combines condemnation of the violence with a structural analysis of the conditions that produce communal violence: the failures of law enforcement, the manipulation of communal tensions by political actors for partisan advantage, and the deeper social and cultural conditions that make communities vulnerable to communalist mobilization.

CHAPTER 78: CRIMINAL JUSTICE, STATE VIOLENCE, AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

78.1 The War Crimes Tribunals: Justice or Politics?

The establishment of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in Bangladesh in 2010 to try individuals accused of atrocities during the 1971 liberation war was one of the most significant legal events of the post-independence period, and Khan's engagement with the proceedings of the tribunal is one of the most complex and carefully argued positions in his entire body of work. He supported the principle of accountability for the atrocities of 1971; he had serious concerns

about the specific procedures and standards adopted by the tribunal; and his analysis of both the principle and the specific procedures reflects a deep engagement with the international literature on transitional justice and war crimes accountability.

The case for accountability was, for Khan, rooted in his understanding of the liberation movement and its legacy. The atrocities of 1971, the systematic killing of civilians, the targeted murder of intellectuals on the eve of the Pakistani surrender, the mass sexual violence against Bengali women, were not simply the incidental brutality of war but a deliberate campaign of ethnic and political destruction. The failure to hold the perpetrators of these atrocities accountable had, in Khan's analysis, left a deep wound in the Bangladeshi body politic: a wound that continued to fester, that was exploited by those who had reason to deny or minimize the atrocities, and that prevented the genuine reconciliation that a healthy democratic polity requires.

The argument for accountability was also, for Khan, an argument about the rule of law: about the principle that no one is above the law, that even those who commit atrocities in the exercise of political or military power are subject to legal accountability. The impunity that the perpetrators of 1971 had enjoyed for four decades, including the participation of parties associated with the wartime collaborators in Bangladeshi governments, was itself a form of constitutional violation: a violation of the principle of equal justice that the constitution proclaimed.

But Khan also had serious reservations about the specific way in which the war crimes accountability process was conducted by the International Crimes Tribunal as established by the Awami League government. The tribunal's procedures departed from international standards of fair trial in several significant respects: the rules of evidence and procedure were modified in ways that reduced the protections available to defendants; some of the sentences imposed, including death sentences, seemed disproportionate to the specific conduct proven; and the selection of defendants appeared to be influenced by considerations of political advantage, with individuals associated with the opposition BNP-Jamaat alliance being disproportionately targeted while equally or more culpable individuals associated with other political formations were not prosecuted.

These concerns did not lead Khan to oppose the accountability process altogether; they led him to insist on a more rigorous standard of fair trial and legal process that would make the accountability genuine rather than selective, that would ensure that justice was being done rather than that justice was being used as a political weapon. The distinction between genuine accountability, which requires impartial application of legal standards to all the perpetrators of the relevant conduct, and political accountability, which selectively invokes legal processes against political opponents while protecting political allies, is one that Khan has made repeatedly and with considerable force.

78.2 Extrajudicial Killings and the Problem of State Impunity

The Bangladeshi state has, under governments of both major parties, engaged in practices of extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance that constitute gross violations of human rights and fundamental violations of the rule of law. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite law enforcement unit, has been implicated in hundreds of extrajudicial killings that the government

has sought to justify under the rubric of anti-terrorist operations or the elimination of criminals. The phenomenon of enforced disappearance, in which individuals are taken by state security forces and never heard from again, has been documented by human rights organizations as a systematic practice under successive governments.

Khan's analysis of these practices draws on his broader critique of the postcolonial state and its tendency to reproduce the arbitrary and violent methods of colonial governance. The colonial state maintained its power through a combination of formal legal procedures and extra-legal violence; the postcolonial state inherited this dual structure, maintaining formal legal institutions while also maintaining the capacity for violence that operated outside and beneath those institutions. The extrajudicial killing campaigns of successive Bangladeshi governments are, from this perspective, not aberrations from a generally law-governed order; they are expressions of a structural feature of the postcolonial state: the gap between the formal rule of law and the actual exercise of state power.

This analysis connects to Khan's reading of Giorgio Agamben's concept of the state of exception and the camp as the paradigmatic site of modern sovereignty. For Agamben, modern sovereign power operates by creating zones of exception, spaces in which the normal protections of the rule of law are suspended and in which human beings are reduced to bare life, life stripped of its political and legal protections. The extrajudicial killing campaign is, from this perspective, the operation of a permanent state of exception applied to those whom the state has identified as threats to order: a permanent zone of exception in which the target is reduced to bare life that can be killed without legal accountability.

Khan does not accept the Agambenian framework entirely; he is skeptical of its tendency toward an undifferentiated account of modern sovereignty that fails to adequately distinguish between different forms of state power and different conditions under which that power is exercised. But he finds in Agamben's analysis a useful diagnostic tool for identifying what is at stake in the extrajudicial killing campaigns: the claim by the state that there exists a domain of life that is beyond the protection of law, a claim that is fundamentally incompatible with the rule of law and with constitutional democracy.

78.3 The Shahbagh Movement and the Politics of Accountability

The Shahbagh Movement of 2013, in which hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis gathered in central Dhaka to demand the death penalty for those convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal, was a moment of significant political complexity that tested Khan's ability to hold together his commitments to accountability for 1971 atrocities, to fair trial standards, and to democratic pluralism. He came out in strong support of the movement's central demand for accountability, strongly criticizing the Islamist parties that opposed the tribunal and their claims that the proceedings were unjust, while also maintaining his critical reservations about specific aspects of the tribunal's procedures.

His analysis of the Shahbagh Movement is illuminating because it reveals the specific way in which he negotiates the tension between popular democratic demands and liberal legal standards. He does not simply defer to the popular demand for the death penalty; he maintains that legal

standards of proportionality and fair trial must be respected even in the face of popular pressure. But he also does not simply invoke liberal legal standards against the popular demand; he takes seriously the legitimate grievances that motivated the movement and insists that genuine accountability, properly conducted, is the appropriate response.

This position was attacked from multiple directions: by those who saw his support for the movement as endorsing mob justice, and by those who saw his critical reservations about the tribunal's procedures as providing cover for those who wanted to avoid accountability altogether. Khan's response to these critiques was characteristically direct: the critique of specific procedural deficiencies in the tribunal's proceedings is not the same as opposition to accountability; it is the opposite, a demand for the kind of rigorous, impartial, and fair legal process that alone can produce genuine rather than merely formal justice.

78.4 Transitional Justice as a Framework for Democratic Consolidation

Khan's engagement with the specific issues of war crimes accountability and extrajudicial killing is situated within a broader theoretical framework of transitional justice: the body of theory and practice that has developed over the past half-century around the question of how societies emerging from periods of authoritarian rule or mass violence should deal with the legacies of that past.

The transitional justice literature, associated with scholars like Jon Elster, Ruti Teitel, Priscilla Hayner, and Pablo de Greiff, has developed a repertoire of mechanisms for addressing the legacy of past wrongs: criminal prosecution, truth commissions, reparations programs, institutional reform, amnesty, and various combinations of these approaches. These mechanisms represent different ways of balancing the competing goals of accountability, truth, reparation, and social reconciliation that are all legitimate objectives of transitional justice processes.

Khan's engagement with this literature is selective and critical, as is his engagement with all bodies of theory. He finds the criminal prosecution model most compelling when properly implemented, because it embodies the principle of individual accountability that is, for him, a fundamental requirement of the rule of law: the principle that those who commit atrocities are personally responsible for their actions and cannot shelter behind the authority of the state or the orders of superiors. But he also recognizes the limitations of criminal prosecution as a comprehensive response to mass violence: the practical limits on the number of cases that can be effectively prosecuted, the difficulty of proving individual criminal responsibility for conduct that was organized and carried out collectively, and the danger that highly visible criminal trials will produce political martyrs rather than genuine accountability.

He is more skeptical of truth commission models, though not dismissive of them. His skepticism is rooted in his concern about the tendency of truth commissions to produce a discourse of reconciliation that papers over the continuing structures of power and inequality that made the original violence possible, and that benefits primarily those who committed the original violence by facilitating their reintegration into respectable society without genuine accountability. This concern connects to his broader critique of liberal transitional justice theory's emphasis on individual reconciliation at the expense of structural transformation.

The transitional justice framework that Khan finds most compelling is one that combines criminal accountability for the most serious offenders with a genuine process of structural reform that addresses the institutional conditions that made the original violence possible. In the Bangladeshi context, this means not just prosecuting those responsible for specific atrocities but reforming the institutions, the security services, the judicial system, the political parties, the media, that enabled and facilitated those atrocities. Genuine transitional justice, for Khan, is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of democratic reconstruction.

CHAPTER 79: SOVEREIGNTY, INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD ORDER

79.1 The Problem of Sovereignty in the Postcolonial Era

Sovereignty, the principle that states have supreme authority over their own territory and affairs and are not subject to the authority of any external power, has been both the foundation of the international legal order since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and one of the most contested and problematic concepts in contemporary international politics. For postcolonial states, the principle of sovereignty has a particular significance: it was the demand for sovereignty, the right of self-determination, that animated the independence movements of the twentieth century, and the achievement of formal sovereignty was the most visible marker of the end of colonial subjugation.

But the formal achievement of sovereignty has not resolved the substantive problem of self-determination for most postcolonial states. As Khan has argued extensively, formal sovereignty without economic independence, without genuine political autonomy, without the capacity to make and implement effective decisions about one's own national development, is a limited and easily manipulated achievement. The neocolonial order that succeeded formal colonialism maintained the essential structures of economic dependency while replacing direct colonial administration with indirect mechanisms of control through international financial institutions, bilateral aid conditionalities, trade agreements, and the geopolitical pressures of major powers.

Khan's analysis of sovereignty is grounded in his understanding of the history of the international legal order. He argues that the principle of sovereign equality, enshrined in the United Nations Charter as the foundational principle of the post-World War II international order, was from the beginning a formal principle that abstracted from the profound inequalities of economic and political power among states. The formal equality of states in international law coexisted with, and indeed helped to legitimate, a system of profound substantive inequality in which the major powers made decisions that affected the entire world without any meaningful accountability to those affected, while smaller and weaker states were constrained in their domestic policy choices by the pressures of the international economic and political system.

This analysis draws on the tradition of Third World approaches to international law, associated with scholars like B.S. Chimni, Antony Anghie, and Makau Mutua, who have argued that the international legal order was constructed by and for the major powers and that it systematically

privileges their interests while constraining the policy space available to developing countries. Khan finds this tradition intellectually congenial and politically important, and his engagement with it connects his legal analysis to his broader postcolonial intellectual project.

79.2 India and Bangladesh: A Legal Analysis of Regional Hegemony

Among the international relations issues that Khan has engaged with most extensively and controversially is the relationship between India and Bangladesh. This relationship is, by any measure, one of the most important in Khan's political world: India is Bangladesh's largest neighbor, its most important trading partner, and the country that provided decisive military support for Bangladeshi independence in 1971. But India is also, in Khan's analysis, a hegemonic power that has consistently used its size, economic importance, and political influence to shape Bangladeshi politics in ways that serve Indian interests at the expense of Bangladeshi sovereignty and democratic self-determination.

Khan's critique of Indian hegemony in Bangladesh operates on several levels. At the most concrete level, he points to specific instances of Indian interference in Bangladeshi domestic politics: the support for the Awami League as Bangladesh's preferred governing party, the use of the Liberation War narrative to create a relationship of moral dependency between India and the Bangladeshi state, the manipulation of bilateral economic relationships to extract political concessions, and the deployment of minority rights discourse to generate leverage over Bangladeshi domestic politics.

At a more structural level, Khan analyzes the India-Bangladesh relationship as an instance of what he calls proto-colonial hegemony: a relationship in which one state exercises substantial control over the political and economic affairs of another through mechanisms that fall short of formal colonial rule but that substantially compromise the sovereignty and democratic self-determination of the subordinate state. This concept, which Khan has developed in several public interventions including his December 2024 statement on India's colonial ambitions, is theoretically indebted to the dependency theory framework that he deploys in his political economy analysis.

The legal dimensions of this hegemonic relationship deserve particular attention. The specific treaties and agreements that govern the India-Bangladesh relationship, particularly the treaties on water-sharing, trade, and security cooperation, have been analyzed by Khan as instances of what he calls structured dependency: legal arrangements that present as bilateral agreements between equal sovereign states but that in practice embody highly asymmetric power relations and systematically favor the interests of the more powerful party.

The Farakka Barrage dispute, in which the diversion of Ganges water by India has had severe consequences for the ecology and agriculture of northern Bangladesh, is a paradigmatic instance of this structured dependency. The legal framework governing Farakka, including the 1996 treaty on the sharing of Ganges waters, is formally a bilateral treaty between sovereign states; in practice, it represents a situation in which Bangladesh has had to accept severely limited water flows because it lacks the power to compel India to provide greater shares, while the legal framework provides India with legitimacy for maintaining arrangements that serve its interests.

Khan's analysis of Indian hegemony also engages with the question of how Bangladesh should respond to this situation in ways that protect its sovereignty without unnecessarily antagonizing a large and important neighbor. He does not advocate confrontation for its own sake; he advocates the development of a more genuinely autonomous foreign policy, a more diversified set of international relationships, and a domestic economic development strategy that reduces Bangladesh's dependence on the terms set by India and other major powers. This is, ultimately, a legal as well as a political argument: it is an argument about what genuine sovereignty requires in the contemporary international order.

79.3 The Rohingya Crisis and International Legal Obligations

The presence of more than a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, who have fled genocide in Myanmar, is one of the most significant humanitarian and international legal challenges that Bangladesh faces, and Khan has engaged with this challenge with characteristic depth and intellectual seriousness. His engagement connects to several dimensions of his broader intellectual project: his analysis of communalism and ethnic violence, his engagement with the international human rights framework, his postcolonial analysis of the international legal order, and his commitment to the principle of human dignity as a foundational value.

The Rohingya crisis is, at its root, a case of ethnic cleansing that the international legal framework has failed to prevent or adequately respond to. The Rohingya people, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, have been subjected to systematic discrimination, disenfranchisement, and episodic mass violence by the Myanmar state and Buddhist nationalist groups. The violence of 2016 and 2017, which drove more than 700,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh in a matter of months, has been characterized by the United Nations Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide as genocide, and proceedings have been initiated before the International Court of Justice by The Gambia on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Khan's analysis of the international legal response to the Rohingya crisis is a case study in the limitations of international law as an instrument of justice. The ICJ proceedings, while significant as a precedent-setting use of the Genocide Convention's interstate complaint mechanism, have proceeded with extraordinary slowness; provisional measures were ordered in 2020 requiring Myanmar to take steps to protect the Rohingya, but these measures have not been effectively implemented. China's blocking of Security Council action on Myanmar has prevented the most powerful mechanism of international enforcement from being deployed. The practical protection available to the Rohingya through international law has been minimal.

For Bangladesh, the Rohingya crisis presents a profound tension between the humanitarian obligation to protect people who are fleeing genocide and the economic and political constraints on Bangladesh's capacity to provide permanent refuge to such a large population. Khan's analysis of this tension is sympathetic to Bangladesh's difficult position: a developing country that is itself poor and crowded, that faces its own developmental challenges, that is bearing an international obligation that should by rights be shared much more broadly by the international community. But he also insists that the treatment of the Rohingya must be governed by the principles of human dignity that he regards as foundational, and that any response to the crisis that involves the coercive return of refugees to conditions of danger violates those principles.

His analysis of the Rohingya crisis also engages with the question of statelessness in international law. The Rohingya are, in an important sense, stateless: they have been denied citizenship by Myanmar, and no other state has taken responsibility for their legal status. The international legal framework for dealing with statelessness, centered on the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, provides inadequate protection and has not been widely ratified. This gap in the international legal framework, the failure to provide adequate legal protection for people who fall outside the state system, is, for Khan, another instance of the way in which international law reflects the interests of states rather than the interests of the people who are most vulnerable to state power.

CHAPTER 80: TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL LEGAL PHILOSOPHY: SYNTHESIS AND PROSPECTS

80.1 The Elements of Khan's Legal Philosophy

Having traced the various dimensions of Khan's engagement with legal theory, constitutional law, jurisprudence, and the specific legal issues of Bangladesh and the wider postcolonial world, we are now in a position to attempt a synthesis of his jurisprudential positions. What are the key elements of what might be called a Khanian legal philosophy, and how do they hang together?

The first and most fundamental element is the insistence on the historical situatedness of law. For Khan, there is no ahistorical, universal legal order from which all particular legal systems are deviations; there is only the historically specific legal order that a particular society has developed through its particular history, and the question of what principles should govern the reform and transformation of that order cannot be answered without understanding how it came to be what it is. This historical situatedness is not a counsel of despair or relativism; it is a condition of genuine understanding, without which any attempt at legal reform will be superficial and ineffective because it will fail to grasp the specific mechanisms through which the existing legal order reproduces itself and resists transformation.

The second element is the analysis of law as an expression of social power relations, specifically the power relations of colonial capitalism and their postcolonial successors. This Marxist dimension of Khan's legal philosophy does not reduce law to a simple reflection of economic power; it recognizes the relative autonomy of legal forms and their capacity to shape as well as reflect social relations. But it insists that the question of whose interests are served by a particular legal arrangement is always a relevant and important question, and that legal reform that does not address the underlying power relations that produced the existing legal order will be limited and reversible.

The third element is the Lacanian analysis of law as a symbolic order that constitutes subjects as well as governing their behavior. This psychoanalytic dimension of Khan's legal philosophy adds a level of analysis that neither the Marxist critique of ideology nor the sociological analysis of legal institutions alone can provide: it addresses the way in which legal categories and legal procedures shape the psychic life of the subjects who are constituted by them, and the way in

which the desire for justice, for recognition, and for inclusion that motivates legal claims is always already structured by the symbolic order of law itself.

The fourth element is the commitment to substantive rather than merely formal rights: the insistence that rights are meaningless without the material and social conditions for their exercise, and that a legal order that proclaims formal rights while tolerating the material conditions that prevent their genuine realization is engaged in a form of ideological mystification rather than genuine legal protection.

The fifth element is the postcolonial critique of the international legal order and its structural bias in favor of powerful states. This element connects Khan's legal philosophy to the broader tradition of Third World approaches to international law and distinguishes his position from those liberal internationalists who treat the international legal order as a progressive development to be celebrated and extended rather than a power structure to be critically analyzed.

The sixth element, which in some ways synthesizes all the others, is the commitment to constituent power: the insistence that law derives its authority ultimately from the democratic will of the people, that this authority must be continuously renewed through genuine democratic participation, and that a legal order that has become disconnected from the democratic will of the people it claims to govern has lost its legitimacy and may be legitimately challenged through democratic resistance.

80.2 Khan in Dialogue with Contemporary Legal Theory

To appreciate the significance of Khan's jurisprudential contribution, it is helpful to situate it in relation to the major currents of contemporary legal theory. Legal theory in the early twenty-first century is characterized by a proliferating diversity of approaches: positivism, natural law theory, critical legal studies, feminist jurisprudence, critical race theory, law and economics, global legal pluralism, constitutionalism and its critics, transitional justice theory, Third World approaches to international law, and many others. Where does Khan's work stand in relation to this diversity?

His closest intellectual affiliations are with the critical legal tradition, broadly conceived, including critical legal studies, critical race theory, and Third World approaches to international law. With these traditions he shares the insistence on analyzing law in relation to social power, the critique of legal formalism, and the commitment to using legal analysis in the service of progressive social transformation rather than the mere description and systematization of existing legal arrangements.

But Khan's work is not simply an application of these Western critical traditions to the Bangladeshi context. It brings to them several distinctive contributions that deserve recognition. The Lacanian-Marxist framework provides a level of psychoanalytic analysis that most critical legal theorists have not systematically developed; it allows Khan to address the psychic dimensions of legal experience, the desire for justice and recognition, the fantasy of the complete legal order, the specific character of the colonial subject's relationship to colonial law, in ways that enrich the sociological and political-economic analysis that dominates most critical legal theory.

The specific grounding in Bengali and Bangladeshi history provides a perspective that challenges the tendency of critical legal theory, even its most progressive varieties, to develop its analyses primarily from the experience of the North Atlantic world. The history of colonial law in Bengal, the specific character of the Permanent Settlement, the communalization of personal law, the reproduction of colonial legal structures in the post-colonial state: these are not simply local illustrations of general theoretical principles; they are specific historical materials that illuminate dimensions of the relationship between law and power that more abstractly formulated theories tend to miss.

The engagement with Islamic legal tradition, conducted on Khan's terms with a combination of intellectual respect and critical analysis, provides a resource for thinking about legal pluralism and the relationship between religious and secular legal orders that is both practically important and theoretically significant. Most Western critical legal theorists have engaged with religion primarily as a cultural phenomenon or a political force, not as a jurisprudential tradition with its own internal resources for critical analysis; Khan's engagement with Islamic jurisprudence as a tradition that contains within it both oppressive potentials and liberatory resources is a model for how the critical legal tradition might engage more seriously with non-Western legal traditions.

80.3 The Bangla Academy Award and Its Controversies: A Legal and Cultural Analysis

In early 2025, Salimullah Khan received the Bangla Academy Literary Award, Bangladesh's most prestigious literary prize. The award itself was a recognition of his extraordinary contribution to Bengali literature, criticism, and intellectual culture. But the ceremony was attended by controversy: Khan himself publicly complained about what he described as the humiliating treatment of award recipients, who were allegedly required to conduct themselves in a subservient manner before the assembled dignitaries of the state cultural apparatus.

This controversy, which might appear to be a minor matter of ceremony and protocol, is in fact, in Khan's analysis, a symptom of a deeper structural problem in the relationship between intellectual culture and state power in Bangladesh. The state cultural apparatus, including institutions like the Bangla Academy, is designed in a way that reflects the hierarchical structure of the colonial and postcolonial state: a structure in which cultural production is patronized and controlled by the state, in which intellectual and artistic recognition is dispensed by state bodies rather than emerging from the autonomous judgments of cultural communities, and in which the recipients of state patronage are expected to perform a gratitude that positions them as subjects of state benevolence rather than as autonomous intellectual agents whose work deserves recognition on its own terms.

Khan's refusal to perform this gratitude, and his public criticism of the treatment of award recipients, is entirely consistent with his broader intellectual commitments. His insistence on the autonomy of intellectual life from state control, his critique of what he calls the colonial cringe that leads Bangladeshi intellectuals to defer to power rather than speaking truth to it, and his lifelong commitment to the figure of the intellectual as a social critic rather than a cultural ornament of the state: all of these commitments lead naturally to his refusal to accept the terms on which state recognition is offered when those terms involve a performance of submission that undermines the intellectual's proper social function.

This episode also illustrates a dimension of Khan's legal philosophy that has not been sufficiently emphasized in this Part: his analysis of the right to cultural autonomy and the right to intellectual freedom as dimensions of the broader freedom that a democratic constitutional order must protect. The right to free expression, properly understood, is not just the right to say what one thinks without legal punishment; it is the right to participate in cultural and intellectual life on equal terms, without the expectation of deference to power, without the implicit coercion that comes from the knowledge that state patronage can be withdrawn from those who speak inconveniently.

80.4 Legal Education Reform and the Future of Bengali Legal Culture

One of the most practically important aspects of Khan's legal and jurisprudential vision is his sustained engagement with the question of legal education reform. We have already examined his argument for Bengali as the medium of legal education; here we need to examine the broader pedagogical vision that underlies that argument.

Khan's vision of legal education is shaped by his understanding of what law is and what lawyers should be. If law is understood primarily as a technical system of rules to be mastered and applied, then legal education is primarily a matter of professional training: the transmission of technical knowledge and the cultivation of technical skills. But if law is understood, as Khan understands it, as a contested terrain of social struggle in which the principles of justice are at stake, then legal education must be much more than professional training. It must be an education in the history of law, in the social and economic forces that have shaped its development, in the philosophical questions about justice and rights that any adequate understanding of law must engage with, and in the political responsibilities of those who have the power to use legal knowledge in the service of justice or in the service of power.

This vision of legal education is not unprecedented; it draws on a rich tradition of American critical legal education, on the Latin American tradition of popular legal education associated with Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, and on the tradition of South Asian legal activism associated with figures like B.R. Ambedkar and the various traditions of legal aid and public interest litigation that have developed in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. But Khan's articulation of this vision is distinctively his own, grounded in his specific intellectual formation and his specific understanding of the challenges facing Bangladeshi law and society.

The implications of this vision for the curriculum and pedagogy of Bangladeshi law schools are substantial. It implies a curriculum that takes seriously the history of colonial law and its postcolonial afterlives, that engages with the philosophical foundations of legal concepts like rights, justice, and equality, that incorporates the perspectives of those who have been most excluded from and most subject to legal power, and that trains lawyers not just in the technical skills of litigation and legal drafting but in the critical and creative thinking that effective legal advocacy for justice requires.

It also implies a pedagogical approach that uses Bengali as its primary medium, that draws on Bengali and South Asian legal history as well as the English and American case law that currently dominates legal education, that takes seriously the challenges of access to justice in a

society where most people cannot afford legal representation, and that trains lawyers with a commitment to pro bono and public interest work as well as to profitable private practice.

CONCLUSION TO PART NINE: LAW AS LIBERATION OR LAW AS DOMINATION?

Part Nine has traced the legal dimensions of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project across a wide range of issues and at several levels of analysis. We have examined his legal formation and how he transformed a conventional professional education into a critical intellectual practice. We have traced his analysis of colonial law and its postcolonial afterlives in the specific context of Bengal and Bangladesh. We have examined his constitutional philosophy, including his analysis of the 1972 Constitution and its subsequent amendments, his understanding of constituent power and democratic legitimacy, and his engagement with the specific constitutional crisis of July 2024. We have examined his theory of rights, including his critique of formal rights discourse, his engagement with international human rights law, his analysis of legal pluralism and Islamic law, and his insistence on the justiciability of social and economic rights. We have examined his engagement with criminal justice, state violence, and transitional justice, including his analysis of the war crimes tribunals, extrajudicial killing, and the politics of accountability. We have examined the international dimensions of his legal thought, including his critique of the international legal order, his analysis of Indian hegemony in Bangladesh, and his engagement with the Rohingya crisis. And we have attempted a synthesis of the key elements of what might be called his postcolonial legal philosophy.

Several overarching themes deserve emphasis as we conclude.

The first is the unity of Khan's legal philosophy with his broader intellectual project. His legal thought is not a separate compartment of his intellectual life; it is the same fundamental project of critical analysis, historical grounding, and political commitment that animates his philosophical, psychoanalytic, and political-economic work, applied to the specific domain of law. The questions he asks about law are the same questions he asks about everything: whose interests does this serve, how did it come to be this way, what would a more just arrangement look like, and what forces of social transformation might bring it about?

The second theme is the tension between law's emancipatory and dominating potentials. Khan does not have a simply negative view of law: he recognizes its genuine achievements as a mechanism for protecting individuals against arbitrary power, for establishing predictable and principled frameworks for social cooperation, and for expressing and enforcing the commitments to equal human dignity that are the foundation of any just social order. But he also insists on law's dominating potential: its capacity to legitimate exploitation, to reproduce inequality, to exclude and marginalize, to serve the interests of power while claiming to serve the interests of justice. Holding both of these dimensions in view simultaneously, refusing both the legal idealist's celebration of law as the embodiment of justice and the legal cynic's dismissal of law as nothing but power, is one of the most demanding and most important aspects of Khan's jurisprudential project.

The third theme is the relationship between legal transformation and social transformation. Khan is not a legal idealist who believes that changing the law will by itself change social reality; he is equally aware of the ways in which social power shapes and constrains legal change. But he is also not a social determinist who regards legal change as merely superstructural and therefore relatively unimportant. His position is dialectical: law and society shape each other in complex and mutually constitutive ways, and the struggle for social justice must therefore be fought simultaneously on the terrain of law and on the terrain of the social and economic relations that law expresses and reproduces.

The fourth theme is the specifically postcolonial character of Khan's legal philosophy, its grounding in the experience of colonized and post-colonial peoples and its insistence that any adequate legal theory must take that experience seriously as a primary datum rather than treating it as a marginal case or a mere variation on the universal. This postcolonial insistence is not simply a political preference; it is, for Khan, an epistemological necessity: the experience of those who have been most subjected to law's dominating power is the most illuminating vantage point from which to understand what law is and what it can be made to be.

Part Ten of this textbook, which concludes our study, will attempt a comprehensive synthesis of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project as a whole, examining the unity that underlies the diversity of his intellectual engagements, situating his work in relation to the major currents of global intellectual life, assessing his contribution to Bangladeshi and world intellectual culture, and reflecting on the challenges and prospects of the kind of critical, engaged, and emancipatory intellectual practice that his life and work exemplify.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART NINE

Key Concepts in Legal Theory and Jurisprudence

Legal Formalism: The view that legal decisions can and should be determined by the application of legal rules and principles to the facts of specific cases through a process of logical reasoning that is independent of the social, political, and economic interests of the parties involved or the deciding judge. Legal formalism holds that the law is, in principle, a coherent and determinate system of rules that yields correct answers to legal questions through a process of neutral and principled application.

Legal Realism: The American school of legal thought, associated with figures like Oliver Wendell Holmes, Karl Llewellyn, and Jerome Frank, that challenged legal formalism by insisting that law is not a self-sufficient logical system but a social institution shaped by the values, preferences, and power interests of those who make and apply it. Legal realism insisted on studying law in its social context, understanding what courts actually do rather than what they are supposed to do according to formal doctrine.

Critical Legal Studies (CLS): An academic movement that emerged in American law schools in the 1970s and 1980s, extending the legal realist critique by drawing on Marxist, feminist, and

poststructuralist theory to argue that legal doctrine is fundamentally indeterminate, that the rhetoric of neutral legal principles masks the exercise of political power, and that the legal system systematically serves the interests of dominant social classes and groups.

Postcolonial Legal Theory: A tradition of legal scholarship that analyzes the relationship between law and colonialism, examining how colonial law constructed racial and social hierarchies, how it shaped the political and social structures of postcolonial societies, and how the international legal order continues to reflect the interests and assumptions of former colonial powers. Associated with scholars like Antony Anghie, B.S. Chimni, Makau Mutua, and James Gathii.

Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL): A scholarly movement within international law that examines the relationship between international law and the history of colonialism, imperialism, and racial hierarchy, arguing that international law was constructed by Western powers in ways that facilitated colonial domination and that the contemporary international legal order continues to reflect these origins. TWAIL scholars advocate for reforms that would make international law more responsive to the interests and perspectives of the Global South.

Constituent Power: The power of the people to establish a constitutional order, as distinguished from constituted power, the power exercised by institutions that derive their authority from the constitution. Constituent power is the founding power that precedes and is not itself bound by the constitutional order; it is the theoretical ground of democratic constitutionalism, the justification for why the constitution is binding on all members of the political community.

Legal Pluralism: The empirical observation and theoretical position that multiple normative orders, including state law, religious law, customary law, international law, and transnational private law, coexist and interact in any given social field, and that the monistic identification of law with the state misrepresents the actual complexity of the normative landscape within which social life is organized.

The State of Exception: A concept, associated primarily with Carl Schmitt, referring to a situation in which normal legal rules are suspended and sovereign power acts outside the normal constitutional framework. Schmitt argued that the state of exception reveals the true nature of sovereignty, since only the sovereign has the power to decide when normal legal rules do not apply. The concept has been extensively analyzed and critiqued by Giorgio Agamben, Walter Benjamin, and others.

Transitional Justice: A field of theory and practice concerned with how societies emerging from periods of authoritarian rule or mass violence should deal with the legacies of human rights abuses. Transitional justice mechanisms include criminal prosecution, truth commissions, reparations programs, institutional reform, and amnesty, and the field is concerned with how these mechanisms can be designed to achieve the competing goals of accountability, truth, reparation, and social reconciliation.

Judicial Review: The power of courts to review the constitutionality of legislation and executive action, striking down measures that violate constitutional provisions. Judicial review is a central feature of constitutional supremacy models of government, where it provides the mechanism for enforcing constitutional constraints on the legislature and the executive.

Shari'a: Islamic law, understood as the body of religious and legal norms derived from the Qur'an, the Hadith (sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad), scholarly consensus (ijma), and analogical reasoning (qiyas). Shari'a is not a single, unified legal code but a complex and internally diverse tradition of jurisprudential reasoning that has been interpreted differently by different schools of Islamic law (madhhabs) and applied differently in different historical and social contexts.

The Permanent Settlement of 1793: A colonial land revenue policy introduced by the Governor-General Lord Cornwallis that fixed the tax liability of zamindars (landed proprietors) permanently and converted zamindars from revenue collectors into hereditary owners of the lands over which they had previously exercised revenue rights. The Permanent Settlement had profound and lasting consequences for the agrarian structure of Bengal, creating a class of absentee landlords and fundamentally transforming the legal status of peasant cultivators.

Substantive Rights vs. Formal Rights: A distinction, associated with the Marxist critique of liberal rights theory, between rights that are merely formally proclaimed in legal documents and rights that are genuinely exercisable in practice because the social and material conditions for their exercise exist. Substantive rights require not just formal legal recognition but the actual social conditions, including economic resources, political power, and cultural recognition, that make their exercise possible.

Discussion Questions for Part Nine

1. Khan argues that the Bangladesh legal system is characterized by a profound structural continuity with the colonial legal order that it inherited from British rule. What is the evidence for and against this claim? In what specific areas of law do you see the strongest colonial continuities, and in what areas do you see genuine post-colonial transformation? What would a fully decolonized legal system in Bangladesh look like?
2. Khan uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze the relationship between law and subjectivity, arguing that the colonial legal order produced a specifically colonized form of legal subjectivity. How does this psychoanalytic analysis complement or complicate the sociological and political-economic analysis of colonial law? What does the psychoanalytic perspective reveal that the other approaches miss, and what are its limitations?
3. Khan's analysis of the July 2024 uprising draws on the concept of constituent power to argue that the Bangladeshi people have the right to reconstitute their political order when the existing government has lost democratic legitimacy. What are the strengths and limitations of this argument? How does it compare to the liberal constitutionalist view that constitutional change must proceed through established constitutional procedures?

4. Khan is critical of the international human rights system while also insisting on the importance of human rights as a political and legal value. How does he navigate this tension? Is his position coherent, or does it risk undermining the very protections it seeks to defend? How does his critique compare to other postcolonial critiques of the international human rights framework?
5. The question of the relationship between secular state law and Islamic law is one of the most contested in Bangladeshi constitutional politics. How does Khan's approach to this question differ from both the liberal secularist position and the Islamist position? What specific institutional arrangements would his approach imply for the treatment of Islamic personal law in Bangladesh?
6. Khan's analysis of the war crimes tribunals combines support for the principle of accountability with criticism of specific procedural deficiencies in the tribunal's proceedings. How do you evaluate this combination? Is it possible to maintain both positions without undermining either? What would procedurally adequate war crimes proceedings in Bangladesh have looked like?
7. Khan has argued that India exercises a form of proto-colonial hegemony over Bangladesh through a combination of economic leverage, political influence, and the invocation of the 1971 liberation war narrative. How do you evaluate this argument? What is the evidence for and against it? How does it compare to analyses of India's relationship with other South Asian neighbors?
8. Khan's vision of legal education reform centers on Bengali as the primary medium, a curriculum grounded in the history and philosophy of law as well as doctrinal analysis, and a pedagogical approach that trains lawyers as critical thinkers and advocates for justice rather than merely as technical practitioners. What are the obstacles to implementing this vision in Bangladesh, and what would be needed to overcome them?

Extended Reading List for Part Nine

On Legal Theory and Jurisprudence:

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Critical Legal Studies Movement* (1986), the most important theoretical statement of the CLS project and the most sophisticated attempt to articulate a constructive alternative to liberal legalism from within the critical legal tradition.

Duncan Kennedy, *A Critique of Adjudication* (1997), the most developed account of how the ideology of legal neutrality operates in the practice of judicial decision-making and how it can be challenged through an alternative model of adjudication informed by feminist and critical theory.

H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (1961), the definitive statement of legal positivism in the twentieth century and the most important point of departure for any serious engagement with contemporary legal theory, essential for understanding the position against which critical legal theorists define themselves.

Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (1986), the most important alternative to legal positivism in Anglo-American jurisprudence, arguing that law is best understood as an interpretive practice oriented toward principles of political morality, important for understanding the theoretical context within which Khan's constitutional philosophy operates.

On Colonial Law and Postcolonial Legal Theory:

Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (2004), the most comprehensive analysis of the relationship between international law and colonialism, essential reading for understanding the postcolonial critique of the international legal order that Khan develops.

Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique* (2002), a powerful critique of the international human rights system from an African perspective that raises many of the same concerns that Khan raises from a Bangladeshi perspective.

Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963), the foundational analysis of the Permanent Settlement and its ideological dimensions, indispensable for understanding Khan's analysis of colonial property law in Bengal.

On Constitutional Theory and Democracy:

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963), the most profound analysis of the relationship between constituent power, revolution, and constitutional founding in the modern tradition, important for understanding the framework within which Khan analyzes the constitutional significance of the liberation movement and the 2024 uprising.

Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory* (1928, translated 2008), the most rigorous analysis of the concept of constituent power and its relationship to constitutional order, essential reading despite its problematic political implications, for understanding the theoretical framework that Khan both draws on and critiques.

Bruce Ackerman, *We the People* (3 vols., 1991-2014), the most important contemporary American theory of constitutional democracy, which develops the concept of constitutional moments, extraordinary periods of democratic mobilization in which the people exercise constituent power to reconstitute the fundamental principles of the constitutional order, in ways that connect interestingly to Khan's analysis.

On Transitional Justice:

Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (2000), the most comprehensive theoretical treatment of the field, examining the historical development and the conceptual architecture of transitional justice mechanisms.

Pablo de Greiff (ed.), *The Handbook of Reparations* (2006), the most comprehensive treatment of reparations as a transitional justice mechanism, including case studies from multiple countries.

Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena (eds.), *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century* (2006), a collection of essays on transitional justice experiences from around the world, providing essential comparative context for understanding the specific challenges of post-conflict justice in Bangladesh.

On Islamic Law and Legal Pluralism:

Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (2001), the most sophisticated contemporary analysis of the relationship between classical Islamic jurisprudence and the contemporary questions of gender equality and democratic governance.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Toward a New Legal Common Sense* (2002), the most comprehensive theoretical treatment of legal pluralism and the most ambitious attempt to develop a new theory of law adequate to the complexity of globalization and legal plurality.

Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (2013), an important analysis of the relationship between the Islamic legal tradition and the modern state form, arguing that they are fundamentally incompatible in ways that have profound implications for any attempt to implement Islamic governance within the framework of the modern state.

End of Part Nine

Part Ten: Synthesis, Legacy, and the Future of Critical Theory in Bangladesh: Salimullah Khan's Intellectual Project in Global Perspective will follow.

PART TEN: SYNTHESIS, LEGACY, AND THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN BANGLADESH

Salimullah Khan's Intellectual Project in Global Perspective

PREFACE TO PART TEN

We arrive at the conclusion of our study. Nine Parts and many tens of thousands of words have been devoted to examining the life, thought, and work of Salimullah Khan from multiple angles and at multiple levels of analysis. We have traced his biographical formation, from Cox's Bazar to Dhaka to New York and back again, and examined how the specific circumstances of his life have shaped the specific character of his intellectual project. We have analyzed the philosophical architecture of his work, including the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis that functions as his primary analytical lens, his engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, with the Frankfurt School tradition, with postcolonial theory, and with the broader currents of Continental philosophy. We

have examined his historical work, his analysis of the colonial history of Bengal and its postcolonial afterlives, his engagement with the liberation movement of 1971, and his readings of the major figures of Bengali intellectual and cultural life. We have analyzed his political philosophy, including his understanding of nationalism, democracy, and secularism, and his engagement with the specific political crises of contemporary Bangladesh. We have examined his political economy, from his doctoral dissertation on central banking through his analysis of the colonial political economy of Bengal to his critique of neoliberal development ideology and his vision of an alternative development path. And we have analyzed his legal theory and jurisprudence, including his critique of colonial law, his constitutional philosophy, his theory of rights, his engagement with transitional justice, and his vision of a postcolonial legal philosophy.

Part Ten attempts something different: a synthetic overview that identifies the deep structure of Khan's intellectual project, the fundamental commitments and characteristic moves that give unity to the remarkable diversity of his intellectual engagements. We will also engage in a more explicitly evaluative mode, assessing the strengths and limitations of Khan's intellectual project, identifying the areas where his analysis is most penetrating and those where it faces genuine challenges and difficulties. We will situate his work in the broader context of global intellectual life, examining its relationships to and differences from the major intellectual traditions and figures with which it engages. And we will reflect on the legacy and future implications of his work, asking what it means for the future of critical theory in Bangladesh and for the broader project of developing intellectual frameworks adequate to the challenges of the postcolonial world.

CHAPTER 81: THE DEEP STRUCTURE OF KHAN'S INTELLECTUAL PROJECT

81.1 The Problem of Emancipation

If there is a single question that runs through all of Salimullah Khan's intellectual engagements, binding together his philosophical analysis, his psychoanalytic interpretation, his historical research, his political commentary, and his legal theory into a coherent intellectual project, it is the question of emancipation. What would it mean for the people of Bangladesh, for the people of the postcolonial world more broadly, to be genuinely free? What stands in the way of that freedom? What intellectual, cultural, political, economic, and legal transformations are necessary to bring it about?

This is, of course, an enormously large and complex question, and it would be easy to dismiss it as too ambitious, too diffuse, too demanding to serve as the organizing principle of a coherent intellectual project. But Khan's achievement, and it is a genuine and significant achievement, is precisely to have shown that this question can be pursued rigorously and systematically without collapsing into vagueness or utopian fantasy, that the intellectual tools developed in the diverse traditions of critical theory, psychoanalysis, historical materialism, postcolonial theory, and democratic political philosophy, can be brought to bear on this question in ways that are at once theoretically rigorous and practically illuminating.

The specific understanding of emancipation that Khan has developed over the course of his career is shaped by several key commitments. The first is the insistence that genuine freedom is social and collective rather than merely individual and formal. The freedom that Khan seeks is not the freedom of the liberal individual, the formally equal bearer of rights who participates in a market economy and a democratic political system whose outcomes are determined by the interplay of individual preferences and choices. It is the freedom of a people, a linguistically and culturally constituted community, to develop its own forms of life, to realize its creative and intellectual potentials, to participate on equal terms in the production of the global culture of which it is a part.

The second key commitment is the insistence that genuine freedom requires the overcoming of the colonial condition in all its dimensions: not just the formal end of colonial rule, which was achieved in 1971, but the deeper transformation of the colonial structures of consciousness, culture, economy, and law that persist in the post-colonial period and that continue to shape the conditions of Bangladeshi life in ways that fall profoundly short of genuine freedom.

The third key commitment is the insistence that genuine freedom is not achievable through the mere adoption of Western models of development, democracy, and constitutionalism, however those models are understood. The Western models are themselves shaped by and partially constitutive of the colonial relationship, and their adoption in the postcolonial context reproduces dependency in new forms. Genuine emancipation requires a more radical intellectual and political project: the critical engagement with all available intellectual traditions, Western and non-Western, classical and contemporary, in order to develop frameworks adequate to the specific challenges and opportunities of the postcolonial condition.

81.2 The Dialectical Method

The method through which Khan pursues the question of emancipation is consistently and recognizably dialectical, in the specific sense that this term has in the tradition of German Idealism and its critical successors. Dialectical thinking, as Khan practices it, is not a mechanical procedure or an algorithm for reaching predetermined conclusions; it is a mode of intellectual engagement that insists on holding contradictions in view, that refuses premature synthesis, that uses the tensions and contradictions within a given intellectual position or social formation as the lever for developing a more adequate understanding.

Several characteristic dialectical moves are observable across Khan's work. The first is the move from the abstract to the concrete, which involves both a critique of abstract universals that claim to transcend the specific conditions of their production and an insistence on the illuminating power of the concrete particular when it is properly analyzed. Khan's insistence on the specific history of Bengal and Bangladesh as the appropriate starting point for analysis, rather than the application of ready-made general theories to local realities, is an instance of this move toward the concrete.

The second characteristic dialectical move is immanent critique, the identification and exploitation of the contradictions within a given intellectual position or social formation. When Khan analyzes the constitution of Bangladesh, he does not simply compare it to an external ideal

of democratic governance; he examines the internal contradictions of the constitutional text, the tensions between its proclaimed principles and its actual provisions, between its formal commitments and the political realities that produced them. When he analyzes Islamic jurisprudence, he does not simply apply an external standard of democratic rights to its provisions; he identifies within the tradition itself the resources for a more democratic interpretation and the tensions between different interpretive possibilities.

The third characteristic dialectical move is the negation of negation, the identification within a negative or oppressive historical development of the seeds of a more positive possibility. Khan's analysis of colonial modernity, for instance, does not simply condemn colonialism as an unambiguous evil; it identifies within the colonial experience the contradictions that generated both the conditions of possibility for the liberation movement and the intellectual resources, including European critical theory itself, that can be turned against the colonial structures they originally served.

81.3 Language, Thought, and the Politics of the Medium

One of the most distinctive and arguably most significant aspects of Khan's intellectual project is his sustained engagement with the politics of language. His insistence on Bengali as the proper medium of intellectual life in Bangladesh, his critique of English as the vehicle of a continuing colonial dependency, and his practice of writing and speaking in Bengali about topics that are more usually discussed in English: these are not peripheral features of his intellectual project but central to its deepest commitments.

The argument for Bengali as the medium of intellectual life in Bangladesh is ultimately an argument about the relationship between language and thought, and specifically about the way in which the choice of language shapes the conceptual possibilities available to the thinker. When Bangladeshi intellectuals discuss philosophy, economics, law, and politics primarily in English, using categories, concepts, and arguments developed in the context of English-language intellectual life, they are not simply choosing a convenient communication medium; they are positioning themselves within a particular intellectual tradition, accepting a particular set of conceptual resources and limitations, and in doing so making a particular kind of intellectual product that is, for Khan, systematically impoverished relative to what could be achieved through sustained engagement with Bengali language and cultural tradition.

This argument is not simply a cultural nationalist claim about the intrinsic value of Bengali culture, though it has that dimension. It is also a philosophical argument about the relationship between language and thought, drawing on the tradition of language philosophy that runs from Wilhelm von Humboldt through Mikhail Bakhtin and Ludwig Wittgenstein to the contemporary philosophy of language. Languages are not simply different codes for the same thoughts; they embody different conceptual resources, different ways of organizing experience, different possibilities for the expression and development of ideas. A thought that is fully developed in Bengali cannot simply be translated into English without loss, not because Bengali is somehow superior to English but because the two languages have developed different resources for expressing different aspects of human experience, and a thought that develops within the

resources of Bengali language is a thought that exploits different possibilities than a thought that develops within the resources of English.

This philosophical claim about the relationship between language and thought has practical implications for intellectual culture in Bangladesh that Khan has been at pains to make explicit. It implies that the development of a genuinely sophisticated intellectual culture in Bangladesh requires the development of Bengali as a medium adequate to the highest levels of intellectual discourse: adequate to philosophy, to critical theory, to economic analysis, to legal reasoning, to the full range of intellectual activities that modern life demands. And this in turn requires the cultivation of a tradition of Bengali intellectual writing that takes seriously the task of developing new conceptual resources within the Bengali language, borrowing where necessary from other languages and traditions but always doing so in a way that enriches rather than displaces the Bengali medium.

Khan's own writing practice is the most important illustration of what this means. His Bengali prose is not the prose of a thinker who is translating thoughts that were originally formed in English or French into Bengali; it is the prose of a thinker who is genuinely thinking in Bengali, who is using the resources of the Bengali literary and intellectual tradition, the Bengali philosophical vocabulary developed by thinkers from Bankimchandra to Tagore to Ahmed Sofa, and the possibilities for new conceptual creation that the Bengali language offers, to address questions that are genuinely universal in their significance.

81.4 The Public Intellectual in the Age of Digital Media

One dimension of Khan's intellectual project that deserves more attention than it has sometimes received is his practice as a public intellectual in the age of digital media. The traditional conception of the public intellectual, the figure who addresses a broadly educated general public through newspapers, journals, and public lectures, has been significantly transformed by the internet, social media, and the proliferation of digital communication platforms. Khan has adapted to this transformation in ways that are consistent with his broader intellectual commitments while also raising new questions about the conditions of effective intellectual engagement.

Khan's extensive presence on digital media platforms, including his participation in YouTube interviews, his engagement with online news outlets, his presence in social media discussions, has dramatically expanded his reach beyond the traditional audience for intellectual writing in Bangladesh. His lectures and interviews, available on YouTube, have attracted hundreds of thousands of views and have introduced his ideas to audiences far beyond the university campuses and literary circles in which intellectual discourse in Bangladesh has traditionally been concentrated.

This expanded reach has been enormously valuable for the project of creating the kind of broad intellectual and political consciousness that Khan regards as a precondition of genuine democratic transformation in Bangladesh. The ideas of the liberation movement, the critique of colonial consciousness, the analysis of communalism and religious extremism, the case for Bengali as the medium of education: these are not ideas that should remain confined to academic

circles; they are ideas that need to engage the broad public if they are to have the transformative effect that their author intends.

But the democratization of access to ideas that digital media enables also brings new challenges. The quality of public discourse on digital platforms is uneven; the emotional and sensational have systematic advantages over the analytical and nuanced; the incentives of social media platforms systematically reward engagement, including hostile engagement, over genuine intellectual exchange. Khan's engagement with digital media has not been immune to these pressures; his public statements have sometimes been reported in decontextualized or distorted ways that misrepresent his actual positions, and the digital media environment can make it difficult to distinguish between genuine intellectual engagement and partisan appropriation.

CHAPTER 82: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT: STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND CHALLENGES

82.1 The Strengths of Khan's Intellectual Project

An honest assessment of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project must begin with its genuine strengths, and these are considerable. The first and most important is what might be called its synthetic ambition: the attempt to bring together, in a coherent and productive relationship, theoretical resources drawn from very different traditions, the Lacanian theory of the subject, the Marxist critique of political economy, the postcolonial analysis of colonial consciousness, the Bengali literary and philosophical tradition, the Islamic intellectual heritage, and the specific historical and political experience of Bangladesh. This synthetic ambition is rare, and when it succeeds, as it often does in Khan's best work, it produces an intellectual product that is more than the sum of its parts: insights that no single tradition could have generated, analyses that illuminate dimensions of the problem that would be invisible from within any single disciplinary or theoretical perspective.

The second major strength is the combination of theoretical sophistication with political engagement. Khan writes as both a theorist and a public intellectual, and his ability to maintain this combination without sacrificing either the depth of theory or the concreteness of political engagement is one of the most admirable features of his work. Too much academic writing in the critical tradition sacrifices political relevance for theoretical refinement; too much political writing sacrifices theoretical depth for immediate communicative effectiveness. Khan navigates this tension with considerable skill, developing theoretical positions that are genuinely rigorous and politically positions that are genuinely consequential.

The third major strength is the historical depth of Khan's analysis. His understanding of the specific history of Bengal and Bangladesh, from the pre-colonial period through colonialism to independence and the present day, is remarkable in its breadth and sophistication. This historical depth prevents the kind of ahistorical abstraction that afflicts much critical theory, keeping the theoretical analysis grounded in the specific realities of the postcolonial condition as it has been lived in this specific part of the world.

The fourth major strength is Khan's intellectual courage: his willingness to take unpopular positions, to criticize powerful interests and ideologies, and to insist on his own judgments even in the face of strong social pressure. His early support for the war crimes tribunal, maintained at a time when many intellectuals were equivocal; his criticism of the Awami League government's authoritarian tendencies, made at personal and professional risk; his call for Sheikh Hasina's resignation in July 2024; his criticism of Indian hegemony in Bangladesh at a time when such criticism could be characterized as destabilizing; these are instances of the intellectual courage that defines the public intellectual at their best.

82.2 The Challenges and Limitations

An honest assessment must also acknowledge the challenges and limitations of Khan's intellectual project. The most significant of these is what might be called the problem of synthesis: the attempt to bring together theoretical resources drawn from very different traditions risks producing a synthesis that is less coherent than the appearance of coherence might suggest, that paper over genuine incompatibilities between the traditions it draws on, and that sacrifices the specific insights of particular traditions in the interest of an ambitious but ultimately unstable synthesis.

The Lacanian-Marxist synthesis, in particular, has been questioned by critics from both traditions. From the Marxist side, the concern is that the Lacanian framework, with its emphasis on the structural logic of the signifier and its skepticism about the possibility of any final resolution of psychic division, tends to demobilize political action by representing the conditions of alienation and division as constitutive rather than historically specific and therefore potentially transformable. From the Lacanian side, the concern is that the Marxist framework tends to reduce the complexity of psychic life to a reflection of socioeconomic relations, missing the specific logic of the unconscious that resists any straightforward political interpretation.

Khan is aware of these objections and has addressed them in various ways in his writing. His response, characteristically, is dialectical: he insists that the tension between the Lacanian and Marxist frameworks is productive rather than destructive, that it prevents each from the specific deformations to which it is prone when pursued in isolation. The Lacanian analysis corrects the Marxist tendency toward economic reductionism; the Marxist analysis corrects the Lacanian tendency toward a politics of the subject that ignores the social and historical conditions of subject formation. Whether this dialectical response fully resolves the tension is a question that deserves continued engagement.

A second challenge concerns the relationship between Khan's intellectual work and the political movements he supports. The most sustained criticism of Khan from within the Bangladeshi intellectual community has concerned the alignment of his political positions with specific party interests, and specifically the perception in some quarters that his criticism of the Awami League government, however well-founded on specific issues, served the political interests of opposition forces whose commitment to the democratic and progressive values that Khan professes was itself questionable. This criticism is not simply a matter of partisan political calculation; it raises genuine questions about the relationship between intellectual critique and political consequence that any serious public intellectual must confront.

Khan's response to this criticism is, again, dialectical. He insists on the distinction between the internal logic of intellectual critique, which must follow the evidence and argument wherever they lead, and the external political consequences of that critique, which cannot be the primary standard by which the intellectual judges the validity of a position. The intellectual who qualifies their critique of power in order to avoid providing comfort to undesirable political forces has, in Khan's view, already abandoned the intellectual's proper function. This is a defensible position, but it does not make the problem disappear; it requires an extraordinary degree of intellectual discipline and self-awareness to maintain genuinely principled intellectual critique in the face of the intense pressures of Bangladeshi partisan politics.

A third challenge concerns the accessibility and influence of Khan's work. Despite his extraordinary intellectual achievement and his significant public profile in Bangladesh, the impact of his work on the actual practice of law, governance, education, and cultural policy in Bangladesh has been more limited than his ambitions require. The colonial legal structures he criticizes remain largely intact. The Bengali medium that he advocates is still marginalized in higher education. The communalism he analyzes continues to be a potent political force. The dependent development model he critiques continues to shape Bangladesh's economic trajectory. This gap between intellectual critique and social transformation is not unique to Khan; it is the condition of the public intellectual in any society where the structures of power are deeply entrenched. But it is a condition that honest assessment must acknowledge.

82.3 Khan in Comparative Perspective: Analogues and Contrasts

To appreciate the specific character of Khan's intellectual achievement, it is useful to compare him with some of the major intellectual figures whose work provides the most illuminating analogues and contrasts.

The comparison with Antonio Gramsci is perhaps the most instructive. Like Khan, Gramsci was a Marxist intellectual who insisted on the importance of cultural and ideological analysis alongside economic analysis, who developed the concept of hegemony to understand how dominant classes maintain their power through the cultivation of consent rather than simply through coercion, and who combined intellectual rigor with political engagement in a way that produced both significant theoretical innovations and significant political effects. The comparison also illuminates an important difference: Gramsci developed his most important theoretical work in prison, in the forced isolation of the incarcerated intellectual, while Khan has been a public intellectual in the full sense, continuously engaged with the public life of his society through lectures, media appearances, and political interventions.

The comparison with Frantz Fanon is equally instructive. Fanon is perhaps the intellectual who has most directly influenced Khan's analysis of colonial consciousness and the psychic dimensions of the colonial condition. Like Fanon, Khan combines psychoanalytic analysis with political-economic critique and historical analysis, and like Fanon, he refuses to separate the individual dimensions of colonial subjection from its social and political dimensions. The difference between them is in part contextual: Fanon was writing in the midst of an anti-colonial revolutionary struggle, and the urgency and violence of that situation shaped the tone and the political conclusions of his work in ways that are not fully replicated in the Bangladeshi context.

The comparison with Edward Said is also illuminating. Said, like Khan, combined literary and cultural criticism with political analysis, was deeply committed to the Palestinian national cause, and engaged extensively with the relationship between Western intellectual production and colonial power. The central concept of Said's *Orientalism*, the argument that Western representations of the Orient function as instruments of colonial power by constructing the Orient as the exotic, irrational, and subordinate Other that defines the rational, progressive, and dominant West, has clear resonances with Khan's analysis of the colonial construction of Bengali identity. The difference between them is, again, partly contextual and partly methodological: Said drew primarily on Foucauldian discourse analysis rather than on Lacanian psychoanalysis or Marxist political economy, and his political horizon was more directly shaped by the specific situation of Palestinian dispossession than by the more diffuse condition of Bangladeshi postcoloniality.

82.4 The Bengali Intellectual Tradition: Khan's Place in a Longer Story

To understand Khan's significance for Bangladeshi and Bengali intellectual culture, it is necessary to situate him within the longer history of the Bengali intellectual tradition that he has himself analyzed so extensively. This tradition is one of remarkable richness and diversity, running from the polymath reformers of the Bengal Renaissance, through the poets and novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the political thinkers and cultural critics of the liberation era and the post-independence period.

Khan situates himself in this tradition primarily through his relationship to Ahmed Sofa, whose work he regards as the most important achievement of twentieth-century Bangladeshi intellectual life and whose legacy he has done more than anyone else to preserve and extend. But Sofa is not the only figure in the Bengali intellectual tradition to whom Khan relates; his reading of Kazi Nazrul Islam as an anti-colonial democratic thinker, his engagement with the popular religiosity of Lalou Shah and the Baul tradition, his critical assessment of Rabindranath Tagore's influence on Bengali cultural and political life, and his extensive engagement with the tradition of Bengali literary criticism: all of these reflect a comprehensive and deeply informed engagement with the Bengali intellectual tradition in its full historical depth.

Khan's specific contribution to this tradition is, at one level, synthetic: he has brought to it theoretical resources developed in the Western critical tradition, the Lacanian analysis of the subject, the Gramscian analysis of hegemony, the Frankfurt School analysis of the culture industry and the administered society, and shown how these resources can be deployed to illuminate dimensions of Bengali experience that the tradition itself had not adequately theorized. At another level, his contribution is critical: he has brought the resources of the Bengali tradition, including its specific historical experience of colonial subjection and cultural resistance, to bear on the Western critical tradition, revealing its limitations and blind spots from a perspective that Western critical theory cannot generate from within itself.

CHAPTER 83: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING AND ITS INTELLECTUAL AFTERMATH: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

83.1 Khan as Witness and Interpreter

The July 2024 uprising, which resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the installation of an interim government, was the most significant political event in Bangladesh since the liberation war of 1971, and it tested the entire apparatus of Khan's intellectual project as an interpretive framework for making sense of major political events. His response to the uprising, from his speech at ULAB on July 31 through his subsequent analysis in lectures, interviews, and published essays, is one of the most important documents for understanding both the uprising itself and the contemporary state of critical intellectual practice in Bangladesh.

Khan's interpretation of the uprising draws on multiple levels of his intellectual framework simultaneously. At the level of political analysis, he understands it as a democratic response to the accumulation of authoritarian practices by the Awami League government over the preceding fifteen years: the rigged elections of 2014, 2018, and 2024, the systematic harassment and imprisonment of opposition politicians, the use of digital security laws to silence journalists and social media critics, the control of the judiciary and the media through political patronage, and the specific triggering incident of the crackdown on the quota reform protesters in July 2024.

At the level of historical analysis, he interprets the uprising as a continuation of the democratic spirit of the liberation movement of 1971, a new assertion by the Bangladeshi people and particularly its younger generations of the fundamental commitments to equality, human dignity, and social justice that were the animating values of the liberation struggle. This interpretation is both historically grounded and politically significant: it claims the moral authority of the liberation movement for the uprising in a way that delegitimizes the Awami League's claim to be the authentic guardian of that movement's legacy.

At the level of psychoanalytic analysis, he interprets the uprising in Fanonian terms as a moment of political awakening: a moment in which the colonized subject breaks free from the internalized self-denigration and political passivity that the colonial condition produces, and asserts their full humanity through collective political action. The specific form of this assertion in July 2024, the willingness of students and young people to face police violence rather than accept the continuation of an unjust order, resonates with Fanon's analysis of the liberating potential of political violence, though Khan is careful to distinguish the moral legitimacy of defensive resistance from the celebration of violence as a political method.

83.2 The Quota Reform Movement and the Sociology of a Generation

The specific triggering event of the July 2024 uprising, the student-led protest against the system of quotas in government employment, deserves analysis in its own right as a sociological and political phenomenon. The quota system, which reserved a significant percentage of government positions for the descendants of liberation war veterans, had become, in the perception of many young Bangladeshis, a mechanism of political patronage that discriminated against merit-based candidates and perpetuated the political dominance of a particular constituency rather than serving any genuine principle of justice.

Khan's analysis of the quota reform movement is nuanced. He is not simply a defender of the meritocratic principle against a system of social reservation; he is aware of the ways in which the language of merit can serve as an ideological cover for the perpetuation of existing inequalities of educational opportunity and social advantage. The students who protest against the quota system on the grounds of merit may themselves be the beneficiaries of social and economic advantages that have given them their educational credentials, and the elimination of the quota system without addressing those underlying inequalities would simply substitute one form of injustice for another.

But Khan is also aware that the quota reform movement expressed something more than a simple demand for meritocracy. It expressed a broader frustration with a political system that was perceived as systematically corrupt, that rewarded political loyalty over competence and integrity, and that had failed to deliver the economic opportunities and democratic governance that the young generation of Bangladeshis was demanding. The quota system, in this reading, was a symbol of a broader system of political patronage and exclusion, and the protests against it were simultaneously demands for a more genuinely democratic and meritocratic politics.

The response of the government to the initial protests, the deployment of police and student political organizations associated with the ruling party to violently suppress the demonstration, transformed a specific protest about employment policy into a broader uprising against the government as such. This transformation, which Khan analyzes as the political equivalent of the Lacanian concept of the point de capiton or quilting point, the moment at which a series of dispersed grievances crystallizes around a specific symbolic event and becomes a coherent political demand, is one of the most analytically interesting aspects of his engagement with the July 2024 events.

83.3 The Significance of Youth and Generation

One of the most striking features of the July 2024 uprising that Khan has emphasized in his subsequent analysis is the role of youth, and specifically the role of a generation of young Bangladeshis who have grown up in the post-liberation period without the direct experience of colonial rule or the liberation war, and whose political consciousness has been formed by the specific conditions of post-independence Bangladesh: the experience of electoral fraud, political violence, economic inequality, and the increasing influence of social media as a medium of political communication.

This generational dimension of the uprising connects to one of the persistent themes of Khan's intellectual project: the question of how political consciousness is formed and transmitted, how the lessons of the liberation movement can be kept alive for generations that did not experience it directly, and what forms of political awakening are available to those who are the inheritors rather than the makers of the liberation movement's achievements.

Khan's analysis of the July 2024 generation draws on his broader analysis of consciousness formation, which is simultaneously Marxist (consciousness is shaped by social and material conditions), Lacanian (consciousness is shaped by the symbolic order of language and ideology), and Fanonian (consciousness is shaped by the experience of subjection and its psychic

consequences). The youth of July 2024 are, in his reading, a generation that has been formed by the contradictions of post-colonial capitalism: educated enough to have high expectations of democratic governance and economic opportunity, but facing a political and economic system that systematically fails to meet those expectations. This contradiction between aspiration and reality is, for Khan, the material basis of the political awakening that the uprising represented.

CHAPTER 84: THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN BANGLADESH

84.1 The Institutionalization of Critical Thought

One of the most important questions raised by Khan's intellectual career is the question of institutional conditions: what kinds of institutions support and sustain the kind of critical, engaged, and emancipatory intellectual practice that he represents, and how can such institutions be created and maintained in the specific context of Bangladesh?

Khan's career has been marked by a series of institutional affiliations that reflect the changing landscape of higher education in Bangladesh and the specific opportunities and constraints that different institutions have offered to critical intellectual work. His years at ULAB, where he directed the Centre for Advanced Theory, represent perhaps the most sustained attempt to create an institutional home for the kind of interdisciplinary, critical, and politically engaged intellectual work that he values. The Centre organized seminars, published journals, invited scholars from across the world, and created a space where young Bangladeshi intellectuals could encounter the major debates of contemporary critical theory in a systematic and sustained way.

The challenges that this institutional project faced, and ultimately the decision to leave ULAB for North South University, reflect the broader difficulties of sustaining critical intellectual institutions in the specific political and economic environment of Bangladesh. University administrations are subject to political pressure from government; funding for the humanities and social sciences is inadequate and contingent; the academic culture that rewards safe, apolitical scholarship and punishes controversial intellectual engagement creates systematic incentives against the kind of work that Khan values.

Addressing these institutional challenges is not simply a matter of good will or intellectual commitment; it requires changes in the political and economic conditions that shape the university system, including greater financial support for the humanities and social sciences, stronger protections for academic freedom, and a broader cultural commitment to the value of critical intellectual inquiry as a public good. These changes are themselves political demands, and making them effectively requires the kind of public intellectual advocacy that Khan has pursued throughout his career.

84.2 The International Dimensions of Bangladeshi Critical Theory

Khan's intellectual project is not simply a Bangladeshi or South Asian project; it is a contribution to global critical theory, a body of thought that engages with some of the most important

intellectual problems of our time from a perspective that global critical theory has often neglected. The questions he addresses, how to understand colonialism and its afterlives, how to develop intellectual frameworks adequate to the experience of the postcolonial world, how to combine theoretical rigor with political engagement, how to use the tools of European critical theory to analyze and transform non-Western realities, are questions that are relevant far beyond the specific context of Bangladesh.

The international reception of Khan's work has been, to date, more limited than its significance deserves. The primary reason for this is linguistic: the bulk of his most important writing is in Bengali, and while some of his work has been translated into English and other languages, the full range and depth of his intellectual project is not accessible to those who do not read Bengali. This linguistic barrier is itself an instance of the problem that Khan has analyzed so extensively: the global academic market, like the global economy, is structured in ways that systematically privilege English-language production and that make the intellectual work produced in other languages invisible or marginal.

Addressing this problem requires not just translation of individual texts but a more fundamental transformation of the conditions of global intellectual production: the development of an international academic culture that genuinely values intellectual production in languages other than English, that creates infrastructure for the translation and circulation of non-English intellectual work, and that recognizes the specific value of perspectives developed outside the Anglo-American academic mainstream. This is a task that goes well beyond the capacity of any individual intellectual; it requires collective action by academic institutions, funding bodies, publishers, and the broader community of scholars committed to the internationalization of critical theory.

84.3 Khan and the Post-Uprising Bangladesh

As of March 2026, Bangladesh is navigating the complex transition from the post-uprising situation of August 2024 to whatever new political configuration will emerge from the processes of constitutional reform, electoral reorganization, and economic policy revision that are currently underway. Khan's engagement with this transition has been, characteristically, both engaged and critical: supportive of the basic direction of change toward more genuine democratic governance, while insisting on specific standards of constitutionalism, rights protection, and social justice that he regards as non-negotiable.

His analysis of the post-uprising situation draws on his entire intellectual framework. The constitutional questions that the transition raises, the legal basis of the interim government, the process of electoral reform, the accountability of the former government for its violations of constitutional order: these are questions that his legal philosophy addresses directly. The economic policy questions that the transition raises, how to manage the immediate economic challenges while pursuing the longer-term structural transformation that genuine development requires: these are questions that his political economy addresses directly. The cultural and political questions, how to preserve the democratic gains of the uprising while preventing the emergence of new forms of authoritarianism: these are questions that his political philosophy and psychoanalytic analysis address directly.

What is perhaps most significant about Khan's engagement with the post-uprising situation is the way in which it illustrates the practical relevance of his long-standing intellectual commitments. The questions he has been asking for four decades, about constituent power and constitutional legitimacy, about the relationship between formal and substantive democracy, about the psychic dimensions of political awakening and political transformation, about the economic conditions of genuine sovereignty: these are not abstract theoretical questions; they are the most urgent practical questions facing Bangladesh in 2026. The intellectual project that began in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka, that was developed in New York and returned to Bangladesh, that has been pursued through decades of writing, teaching, and public engagement, is, at this moment in Bangladesh's history, a project with immediate and consequential practical stakes.

CONCLUSION: AN INTELLECTUAL FOR OUR TIME

This textbook has attempted to trace the full range and depth of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project, from its biographical origins through its theoretical architecture, its historical engagements, its political commitments, its economic analysis, its legal theory, and its vision of a genuinely emancipated postcolonial future. What has emerged from this sustained engagement is a portrait of an intellectual life of remarkable coherence, ambition, and integrity: a life devoted to the project of thinking through the most difficult questions of the postcolonial condition with the best available intellectual tools, and doing so in the service of the democratic and emancipatory aspirations that the Bangladesh liberation movement expressed.

Khan's intellectual achievement is not without its limitations and its challenges, as this textbook has tried to acknowledge honestly. The synthesis he attempts is ambitious to the point where its coherence is sometimes strained. The political consequences of his intellectual positions have not always aligned with his intentions. The gap between the critical understanding he has developed and the social transformation that understanding is meant to serve remains wide. And the specific conditions of intellectual life in Bangladesh, the institutional constraints, the political pressures, the cultural resistances, have limited the influence of his work in ways that his quality alone would not have justified.

But these limitations do not diminish the significance of his achievement. In a world in which intellectual life is increasingly fragmented into narrow specializations, in which political engagement and theoretical rigor are increasingly treated as incompatible, in which the experience of the global South remains systematically marginalized in the production of supposedly universal knowledge, Salimullah Khan represents something rare and valuable: an intellectual who has refused to accept these constraints, who has insisted on the possibility and the necessity of combining theoretical depth with political engagement, who has brought the experience of the postcolonial world to bear on the universal questions of human emancipation, and who has done so with a quality of mind and a strength of character that commands respect regardless of one's specific political or theoretical commitments.

The question of what Salimullah Khan means for the future of critical thought in Bangladesh and for the broader project of developing intellectual frameworks adequate to the challenges of the

postcolonial world cannot be answered with certainty. Intellectual legacies are determined by how they are received and developed by subsequent generations, and that is a story that is still being written. What can be said with confidence is that the intellectual resources he has assembled, the theoretical frameworks he has developed, the historical analyses he has conducted, the political positions he has staked out, and the model of intellectual practice he has exemplified, provide an extraordinarily rich inheritance for any future generation of Bangladeshi and global critical thinkers who wish to take seriously the unfinished project of human emancipation.

The liberation that Khan has spent a lifetime pursuing is not yet achieved. The structures of colonial consciousness, of economic dependency, of political authoritarianism, of cultural marginalization that he has analyzed with such acuity and criticized with such force are still in place, in modified but not fundamentally transformed forms. The struggle for equality, human dignity, and social justice that he identifies as the animating principles of the Bangladesh liberation movement is still ongoing, still contested, still requiring the intellectual resources and the political courage that he has devoted his career to developing and demonstrating.

That struggle, and the intellectual project that serves it, continues.

CONCLUSION TO THE TEXTBOOK: SYNTHESIS AND FORWARD MOVEMENT

This textbook has engaged with the totality of Salimullah Khan's intellectual project across ten extensive parts, each examining a different dimension of his remarkable contribution to Bangladeshi and global intellectual life. Part One established the biographical and intellectual foundations. Parts Two and Three examined his philosophical framework, specifically the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis and its applications. Part Four investigated his historical analysis of Bengal and Bangladesh. Part Five examined his engagement with culture, literature, and aesthetics. Part Six analyzed his political philosophy. Part Seven examined his engagement with religion, communalism, and identity. Part Eight investigated his political economy. Part Nine examined his legal theory and jurisprudence. And Part Ten has attempted a synthesis and assessment of his intellectual project as a whole, including extended engagement with the most recent developments of his career and thought.

Throughout this extended engagement, several fundamental themes have recurred in different forms and at different levels of analysis. The first is the theme of freedom understood in its fullest, most demanding sense: not merely formal liberty but the substantive capacity for self-determination, the real possibility of developing one's full humanity rather than being confined to the position that unjust social structures assign. The second is the theme of history as a resource for the present: the insistence that the specific history of colonialism and its postcolonial afterlives is not dead past but living reality, that it continues to shape the conditions of contemporary life in ways that must be understood and analyzed before they can be effectively challenged. The third is the theme of the synthesis of apparently incompatible theoretical traditions in the service of a more adequate understanding of specific concrete realities. The fourth is the theme of the intellectual's responsibility: the insistence that those who have access

to intellectual resources have a corresponding responsibility to use them in the service of the most fundamental human aspirations rather than in the service of private advantage or institutional convenience.

These themes do not resolve into a simple or easily stated conclusion; they point toward an ongoing project rather than a completed system. The value of Khan's intellectual contribution is not that it provides final answers to the questions it raises, but that it raises those questions with unusual clarity and urgency, engages with them with unusual depth and sophistication, and keeps open the space of critical inquiry and democratic aspiration that any serious intellectual project must inhabit.

It is in this spirit of ongoing inquiry and democratic hope that this textbook concludes, with the aspiration that it will serve as a resource for the continuing engagement with the fundamental questions of human emancipation that Salimullah Khan's life and work so powerfully exemplify.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR PART TEN

Key Concepts in Intellectual History and Critical Theory

Constituent Power versus Constituted Power: The distinction, drawn from the tradition of democratic theory, between the founding power of the people to establish a constitutional order (constituent power) and the powers of the institutions that derive their authority from the established constitution (constituted power). Constituent power is, in principle, unlimited and inalienable; constituted powers are limited by the constitutional framework within which they operate.

Immanent Critique: A method of philosophical and social analysis that criticizes a given intellectual position or social formation from within its own premises, rather than from the standpoint of an external standard. Immanent critique identifies the contradictions and tensions within a position that prevent it from achieving its own stated goals, and uses these internal contradictions as the leverage for developing a more adequate position.

The Colonial Condition: A concept, developed in the tradition of postcolonial theory, referring to the specific forms of social, cultural, economic, and psychological organization produced by the experience of colonial rule. The colonial condition involves not just the formal political domination of one people by another but a comprehensive restructuring of consciousness, culture, economy, and law in ways that serve the interests of the colonial power and reproduce the relationship of domination even in the absence of direct colonial administration.

Hegemony (Gramscian): The concept developed by Antonio Gramsci to describe the mechanism through which dominant classes maintain their social authority not just through coercion but through the cultivation of consent: the production of a set of ideas, values, and common-sense assumptions that make existing social arrangements appear natural, inevitable,

and just, and that thus secure the active or passive acceptance of those arrangements by subordinate classes.

Emancipation: In the tradition of critical theory, emancipation refers to liberation from forms of constraint, whether material, institutional, cultural, or psychological, that prevent the full development of human capacities. Critical theory is characterized by its orientation toward emancipation: its interest in identifying the specific forms of constraint that operate in a given social formation and the possibilities for their transformation or transcendence.

The Public Intellectual: A figure who brings intellectual resources to bear on questions of public concern, addressing an educated general public through non-specialist media and engaging with the practical political and social questions of the day. The public intellectual is distinguished from the specialist academic by their address to a general audience and their willingness to engage with immediately practical and politically consequential questions.

Postcolonial Theory: An interdisciplinary field of intellectual inquiry that analyzes the continuing cultural, political, and economic effects of colonialism in the post-independence period, examining how the structures of colonial domination persist and are reproduced in new forms even after formal colonial rule has ended. Associated with thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and many others.

The Subaltern: A term, derived from Gramsci and developed by the Subaltern Studies collective in the context of South Asian history, referring to those social groups who are excluded from the dominant modes of cultural production and whose perspectives and experiences are systematically marginalized in the historical and intellectual record. The Subaltern Studies project attempted to recover the perspectives and agency of these marginalized groups from within the colonial archive.

Dialectical Thinking: A mode of philosophical analysis, associated primarily with Hegel and his critical successors including Marx, that insists on the interconnectedness and mutual determination of apparently opposed concepts or social forces, and that uses the tensions and contradictions within a given intellectual position or social formation as the lever for developing a more adequate understanding.

Transitional Justice: The set of mechanisms and practices through which societies emerging from periods of authoritarian rule or mass violence address the legacy of past abuses. Transitional justice mechanisms include criminal prosecution, truth commissions, reparations, institutional reform, and various forms of collective memory work.

Final Discussion Questions

1. Khan's intellectual project spans philosophy, psychoanalysis, history, political economy, and legal theory. Is this kind of synthetic, interdisciplinary intellectual project more or less valuable than the deep specialization that characterizes most contemporary academic

work? What are the conditions under which synthetic intellectual projects succeed, and what are the conditions under which they fail?

2. Khan insists on the Bengali language as the proper medium of intellectual life in Bangladesh. Does this commitment enhance or limit the impact and reach of his intellectual work? How does it relate to the broader question of the relationship between intellectual production and language in the context of global academic culture?
3. Khan's intellectual project is explicitly oriented toward emancipation: toward the liberation of the Bangladeshi people, and of the postcolonial world more broadly, from the continuing effects of colonialism and its successors. Is this emancipatory orientation a strength or a limitation of his work? Does it illuminate aspects of Bangladesh's situation that less politically committed intellectual approaches would miss, or does it distort the analysis in ways that reduce its explanatory power?
4. The July 2024 uprising tested Khan's intellectual framework as a tool for understanding major political events. How adequately does his framework explain what happened? What aspects of the uprising does it illuminate most effectively, and what aspects does it illuminate less adequately?
5. Khan's relationship to the Islamic tradition in Bangladesh is complex: he is neither a secularist who dismisses its political significance nor a defender of Islamist politics. How does he navigate this complexity, and how convincing is his navigation? Is his position on the relationship between Islam and democracy in Bangladesh consistent and intellectually coherent?
6. Khan has argued that genuine decolonization of the Bangladeshi legal system requires not just the formal modification of inherited colonial legal structures but a more fundamental transformation of legal consciousness: a new understanding of what law is, what it is for, and whose interests it serves. Is this argument convincing? What specific legal reforms would follow from it, and what obstacles stand in the way of those reforms?
7. The comparison with Fanon, Said, Gramsci, and other major critical theorists illuminates both the strengths and the specific character of Khan's intellectual project. Which of these comparisons do you find most illuminating, and why? What does each comparison reveal about what is distinctive in Khan's contribution?
8. Looking forward, what aspects of Khan's intellectual legacy are most likely to be productive for the next generation of Bangladeshi critical thinkers? What aspects are most in need of revision or development? And what new questions, arising from the specific challenges of the post-2024 political situation and the broader challenges of the twenty-first century, will that next generation need to address?

Extended Reading List for Part Ten

On Intellectual History and the Practice of Critical Theory:

Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), the most accessible account of Said's understanding of the intellectual's role and responsibilities, directly relevant to understanding Khan's self-conception as a public intellectual.

Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 1971), the essential text for understanding the Gramscian tradition that Khan draws on, including the concept of the organic intellectual and the analysis of hegemony.

Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings* (multiple volumes, edited by various scholars), the most comprehensive collection of the work of perhaps the most important postwar inheritor of the Gramscian tradition in cultural studies, essential for understanding the intellectual context within which Khan's cultural analysis operates.

On Bangladesh and its Intellectual Culture:

Rehman Sobhan, *From Two Economies to Two Nations: My Journey to Bangladesh* (2011), a comprehensive intellectual and political autobiography by one of the most important economists of the liberation generation, providing essential context for understanding the intellectual milieu in which Khan has worked.

Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues* (expanded edition, 1980), the foundational analysis of Bangladeshi political culture and its structural problems, still essential reading for understanding the political context within which Khan's political philosophy has developed.

Ali Riaz, *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence* (2016), the most comprehensive recent analysis of Bangladeshi political history, providing the essential political context for understanding Khan's interventions.

On Postcolonial Theory and Its Debates:

Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), the most comprehensive account of the genealogy of postcolonial theory, tracing its development from the anti-colonial movements of the twentieth century through the academic institutionalization of postcolonial studies.

Neil Lazarus (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (2004), a comprehensive overview of the major debates in postcolonial literary and cultural theory, essential for understanding the intellectual context of Khan's cultural analysis.

Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992), a powerful Marxist critique of postcolonial theory that challenges many of its central assumptions and insists on the primacy of class analysis in understanding colonial and postcolonial cultural production, important for understanding the tensions within the tradition that Khan inhabits.

On Democracy, Constitutionalism, and Political Philosophy:

Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (expanded edition, 2004), the most comprehensive overview of the Western political tradition by

one of its most searching critics, essential for understanding the theoretical context within which Khan's political philosophy operates.

Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (2009), a powerful alternative to Rawlsian political philosophy that argues for a comparative and historical approach to justice rather than the search for ideal principles, with particular relevance to the postcolonial context.

Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed* (2004), a major analysis of the specific character of democratic politics in postcolonial societies, arguing that the categories of civil society and democratic representation that dominate Western political theory are inadequate to understand the specific forms of political mobilization and state-citizen relations that characterize postcolonial democracies.

End of Part Ten

End of the Textbook

SALIMULLAH KHAN: PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY, HISTORY, AND CRITICAL THEORY A Comprehensive Academic Textbook in Ten Parts Complete Edition

This book was prepared as a comprehensive academic resource for students, scholars, and general readers interested in the thought and work of Salimullah Khan. It is intended as a living document, to be revised and updated as Khan's intellectual project continues to develop and as new scholarship on his work becomes available.

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